LWN LONDON WEEKLY NEWS GROUP

Chelsea NEWS

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INSIDE THE CITY'S NEW LOCAL

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LABOUR PROTEST DISMISSED AS 'PRE-ELECTION POLITICS'

Councillors clash over the London living wage

KENSINGTON and Chelsea Borough Council's Labour Leader, Cllr Emma Dent Coad, has been accused of playing "cynical pre-election politics" by protesting over what she claims is the council's refusal to pay staff the London Living Wage.

● By LWN reporter **GEOFF BAKER**
geoff@londonweeklynews.co.uk

Cllr Dent Coad claimed - in a press release after clashes at the last council - meeting that the "self-professed richest borough in the universe" Kensington and Chelsea Borough Council, has refused Labour's demands to implement the London Living Wage for the fifth time of asking.

"Despite massive reserves of £283 million, accumulated in part from revenue 'savings' across the council, a meeting of full council refused once again to adopt what the Mayor of London calls 'what you need to live on and feed your family'," she said.

"Angry scenes between Labour and Conservative Cabinet members included an arrogant statement from Cabinet Members that the council paid all its direct staff the LLW - ignoring the fact that all low-paid council staff have now been 'outsourced to private providers in a penny-pinching exercise that has seen some employees barely scratch a living at £6.13/hr minimum wage, while some work long shifts to make up their wages.

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Bordering on racism

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"A previous demand in 2012 for a decent wage for a decent day's work prompted the following tortured statement from the Cabinet Member for Finance: 'It is the role of the national government, through the social security system, to top up earnings in relation to family circumstances.'

"Cllr Robert Thompson, proposing the motion, said: 'More than being good for business, good for families and good for society, the payment of a living wage is fundamentally a moral issue.'

Seconding the motion, Cllr Emma Dent Coad, said: "So the Council expects the government to subsidise their contractors offering low pay, while stigmatising those

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Royal approval for new swimming pool

■ The Duchess of Cambridge with the giant duck swimming aid presented to her by the Royal Borough for Prince George

THE new Kensington Leisure Centre is set to have the trendiest pool in the capital – as the Duchess of Cambridge has revealed that she hopes to teach Prince George to swim there.

If Britain's No 1 style-setter joins other local mums in using the 20-metre teaching pool it will be a huge boost for the £29 million leisure centre when it is fully opened next month.

And as the Duchess is the UK's most-copied woman, it could send sales soaring of yellow duck swimming aids – as the much-emulated Kensington Kate was given an inflatable duck to help Prince George swim as a present from the Royal Borough Council when she opened the leisure centre last month.

The Council presented the Duchess with family life membership for the leisure centre, along with the duck-shaped rubber ring for George and his own personalised kit bag for swimming lessons.

If Prince George does use his local pool to learn to swim, he will be following in the splashes of his father and uncle. The Duke of Cambridge and Prince Harry took lessons at the previous pool on the site when they were pupils at nearby Wetherby Prep School.

Tim Ahern, the council's cabinet member for environment and leisure, said: "During her visit the Duchess was talking about Prince William learning to swim here and she said she hoped Prince George can come here to learn too.

"If George goes to school at Wetherby or one of the other local schools, he will almost certainly come here. Wetherby will use it. All the local private and council primary schools book all the lessons that we have."

The new leisure centre will be fully open in early March. Besides the teaching pool, its facilities include an eight-lane pool for swimming at all levels, a 120-station gym, an eight-court hall, two fitness studios, sauna, steam and treatment rooms.

The new centre replaces one built in the mid-Seventies, which was pre-dated by the Victorian Lancaster Road Baths.

THE paper serving the *HEART* of London

Vote on the 'green infrastructure' that can improve people's lives

£900,000 to improve London's green spaces

The Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, has announced a £900,000 fund for projects across the capital that will improve local green spaces – and Londoners are being asked for their views on which schemes should receive funding.

The Mayor's Big Green Fund II will provide grants of up to £175,000 towards environmental improvements including better walking and cycling links between green spaces and schemes that help to manage flood risk.

Seven projects have been identified by the Mayor and members of the public can give their support for their favourite schemes from today until Monday, March 2nd. Once the poll has concluded, the Mayor's team will analyse the figures and determine which schemes to prioritise for funding.

The seven schemes cover the length and breadth of the capital and range from proposals to restore a marsh in Stanmore to a project that would link two wetland wildlife reserves in Hackney and Walthamstow.

This latest round of funding follows hot on the heels of the hugely successful inaugural Big Green Fund that saw the Mayor of London invest £2million in six environmental projects in Hounslow, Waltham Forest, Sutton, Tower Hamlets, Bexley and Redbridge.

FROM THE MAYOR'S OFFICE

Boris Johnson said: "London is growing by 100,000 people every year and while we are working hard to stimulate the construction of new homes and improve transport infrastructure, we also need better quality green spaces. There is absolutely no doubt that parks and green spaces in urban areas improve the wellbeing and quality of life of local people and through the Big Green Fund II we look forward to transforming sites across the capital that thousands of residents will enjoy."

■ HAVE YOUR SAY: In the Big Green Poll

Simon Hughes, the Environment Agency's Deputy Director London, said: "We were delighted to help the Mayor select suitable projects for the Big Green Fund. The public poll is a great way for Londoners to show their support for projects that will improve their local environment and achieve other benefits such as helping to reduce flood risk."

The Big Green Fund builds on work by the Mayor already underway to make London greener and leafier by investing in 'green infrastructure' that can provide a wide range of environmental and economic benefits. This includes planting an additional 10,000 street trees by spring 2015 and a £2million scheme to transform some of the capital's unloved spaces into 'Pocket Parks.'

In 2008, the Mayor launched his Help a London Park scheme which saw Londoners vote for the parks they most wanted to see improved. Ten parks were each awarded £400,000 for improvement projects, making them cleaner, safer, greener and better places to visit and enjoy.

Members of the public can decide which projects they like most by visiting www.london.gov.uk/biggreenpoll

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Apprenticeship Scheme

WESTMINSTER City Council is committed to helping young people into employment and is very proud of the apprentices on its Apprenticeship Scheme. It has been a huge success with positive feedback from both apprentices and line managers.

Apprenticeships are an excellent way of gaining qualifications, work based skills and experience with all apprentices provided with relevant workplace placements and training from a recognised OFSTED provider.

The council's current apprenticeship programme is delivered in partnership with the London Apprenticeship Company with opportunities at the council advertised on their website.

Kensington & Chelsea

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The Holocaust: 'It's time for the nation to stand together'

● KEEPING THE MEMORY ALIVE: The Prince of Wales addresses The Holocaust Memorial Day commemorative ceremony at Central Hall, Westminster.

■ FROM PAGE ONE

them to reflect upon their professional and personal responsibilities in a democracy today.

"Through rigorous investigation of the events that led to the Holocaust and other recent examples of genocide, public servants can choose knowledge over misinformation, compassion over prejudice and participation over indifference or resignation."

The Prime Minister said: "It is time for Britain as a nation to stand together and say 'we will remember - we will not allow any excuses for anti-Semitism in our country'.

"We not let any form of prejudice destroy the multi-faith, multi-ethnic democracy we are so proud to call our home. We will teach every generation the British values of respect and tolerance that we hold dear. And we will ensure that they can learn from the stories of our Holocaust survivors long after we are all gone.

"That is why today – with the full support of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition – I am accepting the recommendations of the Holocaust Commission."

It is already compulsory for every schoolchild in England to study The Holocaust.

The Commission said: "We are convinced of the need to maintain the Holocaust's place as a mandatory part of the National Curriculum, but that alone is not enough.

"To further enhance Holocaust education, the Learning Centre and its partners would seek to transform the way it is delivered.

"At the heart of this is the use of technology in developing innovative ways to educate young people in the classroom.

"This would include taking some of the technology developed for use in the Learning Centre and making it available around the UK.

"The Commission has been working to develop initial concepts with pro bono support from the Oscar-winning British company, Framestore.

"Framestore have suggested examples of ways technology could be used to bring the Learning Centre to life".

● Digital Journey – Each visitor would be given details of somebody who lived during the Holocaust. This would include the first part of their story, together with an artefact such as ID papers, a letter or a photo. Using an accompanying mobile app the visitor would start to find out more about this person. At the Learning Centre, special touch points would allow a visitor to follow the person's story in more detail.

● Smart Tickets – Throughout the Learning Centre, visitors would be able to use smart devices to access more information and share content online, interacting with digital installations and finding their own links to history. This would be used to customise journeys around the Learning Centre by tracking a visitor's progress and suggesting other things to see.

● Virtual Reality Experience – There would be a space within the Learning Centre where every surface would be projected onto, recreating the schools or streets of 1930s Germany. VR headsets would bring similar 360 immersive experiences into the classroom, recreating scenes from the testimonials of survivors. Video of the survivors within the VR spaces would guide the children through their experiences.

Five-point plan

The Commission stressed: "These would, of course, only be used sensitively to give children insights into, for example, Jewish communities before the rise of the Nazi party or the lives of Jewish families as discriminatory laws were being introduced. It should categorically not be used to shock people with disturbing experiences of the ghettos or camps."

The Commission has announced a five-point plan which it says should form the basis of Holocaust education.

"To achieve greater consistency across Holocaust education, the Commission has identified five learning outcomes to guide the work of the Learning Centre and which it believes should be the objective of Holocaust education for all ages.

1: Knowledge of the historical facts

Of primary importance is that future generations understand the historical facts of the Holocaust. It is such an unimaginable and significant event that people must always understand what happened, why it happened, to whom and what the consequences were. They must understand the enormity of the Holocaust. They must understand the Holocaust in the context of over a thousand years of antisemitism in Europe. They must also learn about the other victims of Nazi persecution.

2: Appreciation of roles and responsibilities

People must understand who carried out the Holocaust. The Holocaust was not carried out by a few key actors, but with widespread complicity. There is already a great deal of education on perpetrators' roles, but not enough on the role of society and bystanders. People should learn that the Holocaust occurred because individuals, organisations, and governments made choices that validated and legalised discrimination and allowed hatred and, ultimately, mass murder to occur.

3: Understanding of the way the lessons of the Holocaust apply more widely, including to subsequent genocide

Holocaust education is a key vehicle in understanding genocide today and to prevent it happening in the future. The Holocaust was a particular and unprecedented event, but its lessons are applicable across societal groups and over time.

4: Recognition of the humanity of the victims

Education should convey the huge loss to humanity of the devastation of the Jewish people. It should seek to restore the humanity of the victims, for example by conveying the richness and value of pre and post-war Jewish communities. Students should also learn about the personal experience of individuals.

5: Promotion of greater tolerance and respect

Education should prepare young people to become socially responsible adults. Holocaust education should encourage people to question their personal motivations and choices – and to build tolerance and respect for diverse groups in society.

Three central London sites are been considered for the Holocaust Memorial, which will be built by 2017 – the Imperial War Museum, Millbank and an area near the Tower of London.

Memorial Day commemoration

THE nation's Holocaust Memorial Day 2015 UK Commemorative Ceremony, organised by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (HMDT) took place at Central Hall, Westminster, with a huge gathering of survivors, dignitaries and celebrities participating in a moving and poignant event.

More 1,000 guests came together to mark the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. Survivors and their experiences were at the heart of the event, reflecting the theme "**Keep the memory alive".**

The ceremony commenced with a procession led by six survivors, the Prime Minister David Cameron, Deputy Prime Minister Nick Cleg and Leader of the Opposition Ed Miliband, and the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall, beginning a powerful programme of music, testimony and film produced in collaboration with the BBC.

Actor Adrian Lester OBE narrated the proceedings, first introducing the Aldeburgh Young Musicians performing *Eliyahu Hanavi*, which was arranged by Viktor Ulmann, a composer who was murdered in Auschwitz on 18 October 1944.

Significantly, the young choir was conducted by Simon Wallfisch, the grandson of Holocaust survivor and member of the Auschwitz Girls' Orchestra Anita Lasker-Wallfisch.

Other celebrities contributing to the ceremony included actor Sir John Hurt reading Primo Levi's poem *Shema*, actor Keeley Hawes reading a letter written to a child saved by Sir Nicholas Winton, and Michael Palin speaking the words of ill-fated *Sonderkommando* member Salmen Gradowski.

Henry Scott-Irvine, writer-broadcaster, and founder-organiser of *The Save Denmark St Campaing*

1. The variety of people and its creative diversity.

WHEN I first moved to London in 1984 Soho was *the* thriving, vibrant, hub of the dfilm and TV industry. Every flat in Wardour Street seemed to whir to the sound of 16mm film editing suites, while nearby production offices vied for business alongside the theatric majors who had their cinema distribution offices running the entire length of Wardour St. Their windows displayed all of the upcoming movie posters. A lot of this post production business has now moved on, but much still remains in St Anne's Court, Dean St, and Soho Square.

2. The pubs and bars.

THESE were always intimate and filled with a huge cross section of people. Mainly Victorian in decor and style, these great watering holes enabled a rub shoulder easy conversation with whoever stood next to you; something that almost never happens anywhere else in the capital – except for Soho. The George in Wardour Street once saw the likes of Sandie Shaw and her former film producer husband Nik Powell who held court with film crews, writers, poets, postmen, tube workers, and students. Many marvellous Soho bars are still filled with fascinating folks across the square mile that is Soho, not least The Coach 'n Horses in Greek Street

3. The restaurants and cafes.

THE cafes were there from the rock 'n roll era and were run by Greeks, Italians, and Maltese. Many of these have gone, but numerous great Italian restaurants still thrive across Soho, alongside tapas bars, curry houses, Chinese restaurants, and burger bars. They facilitate a wide price range and many offer an easily affordable menu to this very day.

4. Soho Square.

IT IS not only the oldest square in Central London, but a great meeting point at lunchtimes for everyone working, living in, or visiting the area. Long may it remain. Let's hope Crossrail 2 does not happen and lead to its untimely demise?

5. No buses go through Soho.

ThIs is actually quite unique. I like this fact!

● If you live or work in Soho we would like you to send us five reasons why you love Soho so much (maximium 300 words)

Email your five **"Why I Love Soho"** reasons to editorial@londonweeklynews.co.uk stating your name, address or place of work, and attaching a photo of yourself.

LWN NEWS FROM WESTMINSTER & PIMLICO editorial@londonweeklynews.co.uk

Churchill's last trip down the Thames

NEVER on the water of the River Thames has one boat meant so much to so many.

The MV Havengore, once a lowly river survey launch, took centre stage in history again last week as London re-saluted Sir Winston Churchill on the 50th anniversary of the great man's death.

The Havengore, originally commissioned by the Port Of London Authority in 1954, became one of the iconic vessels of Britain on January 30th 1965 when she carried Churchill's coffin down the Thames.

Some 350 million people worldwide watched the solemn event on television. For many, one of the most moving moments of the day's state funeral came as the little boat bobbed past the huge cranes which then lined the Thames and the massive steel arms were lowered in sombre tribute.

Although the cranes have long since gone, the memory of the man who saved Britain from tyranny was no less intense last week when the Havengore recreated the famous journey from the Tower to Festival Pier for a wreath-laying as part of a year-long series of Churchill commemorations.

By Geoff Baker

Members of his family and others closely connected to the state funeral were onboard as the Havengore sailed under Tower Bridge and a four-gun salute echoed from HMS Belfast as she passed by.

She is no stranger to special occasions. Besides her central role in the 1965 funeral, in 1977 she participated in a river pageant to mark The Queen's Silver Jubilee and in 2012 the Havengore was personally chosen by The Queen again to carry members of the Royal Family down the Thames as part of a flotilla of more than 1,000 vessels that took part in the pageant to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee. On that journey her passengers included the Duke of York and his family, the Earl and Countess of Wessex and the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester.

She has also taken part in a river pageant to mark the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar in 2005, and in services to mark Armistice Day and Armed Forces Day.

But never will her any journey compare with the pride of place which she took carrying Churchill – which is commemorated on plaque onboard inscribed with the words of Richard Dimbleby, the BBC's commentator at the funeral – "And so the Havengore sails into history, not even the Golden Hind had borne so great a man."

The MV Havengore can be seen at her permanent mooring at St Katherine Docks.

■ **THE MV HAVENGORE passes the London Eye and County Hall, recreating Churchill's last journey carrying his coffin down the Thames**

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New look Cabinet at City Hall

WESTMINSTER City Council Leader Cllr Philippa Roe has announced changes to her Cabinet.

Following the decision by Cllr Ed Argar (pictured) to step down from his Cabinet post, as a result of his selection as a Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Charnwood, it has been announced that Cllr Richard Beddoe will replace him with immediate effect as Cabinet Member for City Management.

Cllr Philippa Roe said: "My sincere thanks go to Ed for his exceptional service as a member of the Cabinet, and I wish him all the very best as he moves forward with his political career -

"I know he will do well. I am delighted that Richard will be joining the Cabinet, he has already demonstrated great aptitude and dedication in a broad range of areas within the Council and I know he will bring those skills to bear in his new role. As we start 2015 I know the whole of my Cabinet is ready for the exciting opportunities we have ahead, and will be ready to meet any challenges."

Cllr Beddoe has served as Deputy Cabinet Member for the Built Environment since 2014, as well as chairing a Planning Applications Sub-Committee. Prior to that, he held the positions of

Deputy Cabinet Member for Housing and Corporate Property in 2013 and Deputy Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Community Protection between 2011 and 2012.

As part of this change, there have been some adjustments to the Cabinet portfolios. Cllr Robert Davis, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for the Built Environment, will now take on responsibility for public realm capital works whilst Cllr Nickie Aiken, Cabinet Member for Public Protection, will now be responsible for the Council's Street and Premises Enforcement staff. Cllr Heather Acton, Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, will now cover Road Safety functions.

Cllr Beddoe's portfolio of City Management will cover street cleaning, street management (except for the Street and Premises Enforcement functions now being consolidated into a new Public Protection and Licensing team), roads and highway maintenance, street schemes, recycling, public toilets, transportation commissioning, transportation works budget, highway maintenance and capital projects, relations with TfL, transport, RTA duties, network management duty, relations with utility providers and transportation policy.

Also as part of this minor reshuffle, Cllr Tony Devenish will become Senior Planning Chairman.

COMING SOON!

The London Weekly News website is currently under construction. In the meantime, if you would like to view the LWN pages digitally, you can access them by clicking onto http://bit.ly/1vS5sl8

LWN NEWS FROM KENSINGTON & CHELSEA edit@londonweeklynews.co.uk

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By LWN reporter **GEOFF BAKER**
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"Cllr Robert Thompson, proposing the motion, said: 'More than being good for business, good for families and good for society, the payment of a living wage is fundamentally a moral issue.'

Seconding the motion, Cllr Emma Dent Coad, said: "So the Council expects the government to subsidise their contractors offering low pay, while stigmatising those who apply for welfare. A responsible Council would not allow their contractors to reap billions paying poverty wages to our people. The Council's hypocrisy is breath-taking.'

Responding to the comments by Cllr Emma Dent Coad in relation to the London Living Wage, Cllr Nick Paget-Brown, Leader of the Council, said: "In case Labour has missed it, the last few years have been very tough ones for the British economy. Wages across the economy, and in the public sector in particular, have been stagnant while utility bills and travel costs have been surging.

"The council has been doing what it can to help its residents by maintaining services and keeping the council tax down.

"But the simple fact is that our budget has fallen by some £50 million since 2010 and there are big further reductions to come. So it is not the most propitious time for adding large costs to our major contracts. Nevertheless low wages in our economy are a real problem and they must be tackled.

"So we warmly support George Osborne's increase of the national minimum wage and his aspiration for an early rise to £7 an hour expressed in his submission to the Low Pay Commission which sets the rate.

"We also support the lifting of the tax threshold to £10,600 and his aspiration to raise it further to £12,500. These are meaningful measures to lift low take home pay but more action will still be needed.

"It's worth noting that the Labour Party's actual national policy is to raise the minimum wage to £8 by the end of the next Parliament, in other words to raise it to where it would be anyway on current trends, so the motion last Wednesday is best viewed as a bit of cynical pre-election politics."

Museum's plans for Dippy cause uproar

by Jack Dixon

PLANS to remove the iconic 'Dippy' the diplodocus skeleton cast as the central display at the Natural History Museum in South Kensington have been met with uproar by thousands of dinosaur enthusiasts.

Fans of Dippy, who has held centre stage at the museum for the last 35 years, launched a campaign to save the much-loved dinosaur within hours of last week's announcement that he will be replaced with a 25-metre blue whale skeleton suspended from the ceiling.

Museum bosses say the new installation is an "important and necessary" change, marking the start of a "decade of transformation".

They suggest that the whale – the largest mammal ever to have lived - will represent the concepts of biodiversity and sustainability, as well as the story of evolution.

But the museum's announcement was met with a barrage of criticism from dinosaur lovers the world over, who have now set up a campaign to keep Dippy at the heart of Hintze Hall.

The 'Save Dippy' petition, launched on the change.org website, has already won the support of more than 20,000 signatories.

It says: "Dippy the diplodocus has been the centre piece in the Natural History Museum for 109 years. He has inspired generations of schoolchildren to look back to the Earth's past and help them think about looking after the planet's future.

"But now after all those years, this important relic is being removed. Dippy is loved around the world and is a monument of British heritage. Replacing Dippy with a blue whale skeleton would threaten this … We demand Dippy is saved and remains in the main hall forever."

Museum chiefs are yet to confirm what will happen to Dippy when the whale moves into its new surroundings in 2017, but it could feature in a separate dinosaur exhibit or be taken on tour to promote smaller museums across the country.

Sir Michael Dixon, director of the Natural History Museum, said it was important to continue to challenge the way people think about the natural world.

"As the largest known animal to have ever lived on Earth, the story of the blue whale reminds us of the scale of our responsibility to the planet", he said.

"This makes it the perfect choice of specimen to welcome and capture the imagination of our visitors, as well as marking a major transformation of the museum."

He added: "As guardians of one of the world's greatest scientific resources, our purpose is to challenge the way people think about the natural world – and that goal has never been more urgent.

"The very resources on which modern society relies are under threat. Species and ecosystems are being destroyed faster than we can describe them or even understand their significance.

"The blue whale serves as a poignant reminder that while abundance is no guarantee of survival, through our choices, we can make a real difference. There is hope."

More than five million people visit the Natural History Museum every year, and its collection is regarded as one of the world's most significant scientific resources.

ARTIST'S IMPRESSION: How the blue whale skeleton will look in Dippy's place

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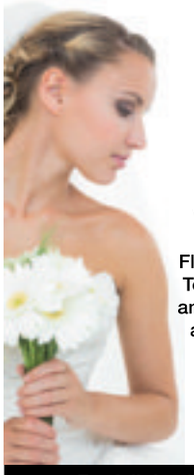

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LONDON WEEKLY NEWS

Celebration for 4,000 veterans

Charity's 100 years of supporting visually impaired ex-servicemen

by Patrick Maguire

EX-SERVICEMEN and campaigners from Blind Veterans UK were joined by David Blunkett MP as the charity marked 100 years of service by unveiling a plaque at the site of its first centre.

The military charity, formerly known as St Dunstan's, was founded in 1915 by Sir Arthur Pearson and has since helped over 35,000 veterans and families affected by blindness and visual impairment. Today, its national network of residential centres and welfare staff offer rehabilitation, care, training and recreational activities to 4,000 veterans - the oldest of whom are centenarians, and the youngest aged 25 - as well as 2,000 dependents.

Ron Freer, a 99-year-old a veteran of World War Two, who has received support from the charity for 70 years, unveiled the commemorative blue plaque at a special ceremony at the DoubleTree Hilton Hyde Park on Bayswater Road - 100 years to the day of the first meeting of the Blinded Soldiers' and Sailors' Care Committee on January, 29th 1915.

> **"Attitudes to blindness have changed, thank goodness, and they've changed because of people campaigning, because of the work of organisations like this one"**

The naval veteran, who celebrates his 100th birthday in October, said that the charity's work has enabled him to "live a long, happy, independent life" after he lost his sight during the war.

Mr Freer was assisted by the former Home Secretary David Blunkett, Britain's first blind cabinet minister and a long-time supporter, who paid tribute to "the tenacity, the resilience and the sheer guts" of the charity and the ever-growing number of people it supports. More veterans have registered for help in the past year than ever before.

Mr Blunkett said: "Attitudes to blindness have changed, thank goodness, and they've changed because of people campaigning, because of the work of organisations like this one... giving support and enabling people to display their talent, their ability, to be able to overcome many challenges."

"This has been a massive 100 years' task in changing the way people see themselves and the way the world has perceived blindness. I've been privileged to be involved."

Also represented at the ceremony were younger veterans from recent conflicts in the Middle East, including London-based Kennett Facal, whose sight is limited to 20 per cent vision in his left eye after an incident which occurred during his service with the Royal Anglian Regiment in Afghanistan.

He said: "The event today was great and it's a privilege to see someone who's been there for more than 70 years."

"The charity's there – if you grab hold of it, if you embrace it, it will work for you."

Mr Facal added that Blind Veterans UK had helped him adjust to civilian life, enabling him to find work as a gym instructor helping disabled people.

The charity also received birthday wishes from a host of famous faces. Video messages from Prime Minister David Cameron, rugby world cup winner Will Greenwood, actors Bernard Cribbins and Richard E. Grant, and London Mayor Boris Johnson were played on the big screen - leading Mr Blunkett to quip: "You can't leave Boris out of anything."

Major General Nick Caplin, chief executive of Blind Veterans UK, said that the charity was "very grateful for the support we get in helping us to take on new challenges."

"We're celebrating the past 100 years, and looking forward to the challenge of the next 100 years."

■ **ABOVE: David Blunkett joined Ron Freer and family to unveil the commemorative plaque**

■ **RIGHT: Kennett Facal (left) was among veterans who attended the celebration**

■ **BELOW: Blind Veterans UK Chief Executive Major General Nick Caplin with David Blunkett MP**

■ **BLIND Veterans UK was set up 100 years ago by Sir Arthur Pearson, pictured, the founder of the Daily Express and Pearson's Weekly.**

Sir Arthur was blinded by glaucoma. On 29 January 1915, he founded The Blinded Soldiers and Sailors Care Committee (later renamed St Dunstan's and now known as Blind Veterans UK), for soldiers blinded by gas attack or trauma during the First World War.

The charity's goal, radical for the times, was to provide vocational training rather than charity for invalided servicemen, to enable them to carry out independent and productive lives.

LWN

LONDON WIDE

AUTHOR James Bowen and his ever-present companion Bob

Street Cat Bob's quick read crusade

Bestselling author James Bowen and his famous furry friend Street Cat Bob are on a mission to get the nation reading

HE'S a life-changing little man, that's for sure." Worldwide bestselling author James Bowen can barely contain his gratitude and love for Bob, the small bundle of ginger fluff who completely reversed his fates. When the pair met while Bowen was a homeless addict,

Bob gave his new owner a sense of responsibility and the pair became a regular fixture on London's busking circuit - shortly before Bowen was given the chance to tell his (and Bob's!) story in a series of successful books.

Now the pair are hoping to encourage others to take up reading, via the Galaxy Quick Reads campaign, which offers people an accessible route into the world of books.

All the Quick Reads are written by big name authors, but are shorter and easier to tackle: perfect for adults who are less confident in their reading skills.

For Bowen - a prolific reader, who says he has books all over his flat - reading has had a profoundly positive impact on his personal wellbeing.

"Reading, or in fact anything that can help you focus your mind, is absolutely an essential part of the plan in helping someone with a mental illness or any emotional problems," he explains.

"Especially if someone is wanting to escape depression; reading is uplifting. However, some people find it hard to read when depressed though, maybe due to a lack of concentration. I'm really proud to have my book turned into a Galaxy Quick Reads - because they are bite size they are great for people who want to read but might struggle with bigger books. I think reading can help heal the mind, giving the reader something to connect and relate to."

As both a reader and an author, Bowen offers some insight into just what makes books such magical things.

"Reading is such a great way to switch off from the outside world and relax. But it can also open your mind to new ideas, people and places. It's a great form of escape, if you are sitting on a train or a bus or something, books are a great thing to have because the time will fly past!"

As a man who has completed many book tours over the last few years Bowen knows a thing or two about keeping occupied whilst travelling. But in his opinion, books definitely offer something more that just an enjoyable distraction.

"If you are reading a good book, and it really sinks in to you, then you can really experience something else," he says.

"Somebody wrote a comment on Amazon that my book was the 21st century version of 'Down and Out in Paris and London' by George Orwell, and while I could never accept that kind of honour, I do believe that books like mine - especially autobiographies - give people a whole new perspective on a kind of life that they might not know about."

For Bowen, Dostoyevsky's classic 'Crime and Punishment' was a total game-changer.

"It's such a brilliant book - quite a difficult read though, I wouldn't recommend it for an early Quick Reader - but having been a drug addict, I can understand the story of having to make money and having to take responsibility for the consequences."

Before he had a place of his own, Bowen would sometimes take a break from the streets to spend time in a bookshop or library. "It is a shame that bookshops aren't as prominent as they used to be. I have a real soft spot for comics and graphic novels, I'm a bit of a geek like that, so I would always hit the graphic novel section first. I love bookshops and libraries because you could be looking for one thing and stumble across something totally different. They suck you in like that!" he smiles.

Thankfully, Bowen's homeless days are long behind him now, mainly thanks to Bob, who still keeps him company, wherever the author's work takes him.

"He is always by my side," he smiles. "Even if I have got my nose stuck in a book - which is a lot of the time - he's not on my lap but he is always nearby, on the armrest or by my side on the sofa. He's wonderful, such a calming chap."

Galaxy Quick Reads are bite-sized books written by best-selling authors. They are available from bookshops, supermarkets and online or can be borrowed from libraries across the country. For more information visit www.quickreads.org.uk.

Where To Find Your Brand New Local Newspaper

London News
Thank you Ma'am
Westminster & Pimlico NEWS
Thousands of children homeless at Christmas
Kensington NEWS
People power protest over the pension tax
Chelsea NEWS
People power protest over the pension tax

Kensington News pick up points

TCG Co-op MM Premium	210-212 Earls Court Road	Kensington	SW5 9QB
Sainsbury's Store	158a Cromwell Road	South Kensington	SW7 4EJ
Tesco Metro	146-148 High Street	Kensington	W8 6SU
Sainsbury's Store	Ladbroke Grove	London	W10 5AA
Tesco Metro	224-226 Portobello Rd	Notting Hill	W11 1LJ
Tesco Metro	114-120 Notting Hill Gate	Notting Hill	W11 3QE
Tesco Super Store	West Cromwell Road	Kensington	W14 8PB
Kensington Central Library	Philimore Walk	Kensington	W8 7RX
North Kensington Library	108 Ladbroke Grove	Kensington	W11 1PZ
Brompton Library	210 Old Brompton Road		SW5 0BS

London Weekly News pick up points

Sainsbury's Store	Melbourne Avenue	West Ealing	W13 9BZ
Tesco Metro	94 Church Street	Paddington	NW8 8EX
Tesco Classic Metro	17-25 Regent Street	London	SW1Y 4LR
TCG Co-op City	104-105 Berwick Street	Soho	W1F 0QS
Sainsbury's Store	38 Stratton Street	Mayfair	W1J 8LT
Sainsbury's Store	15-17 Tottenham Court Road	Central London	W1T 1BJ
TCG Co-op MM Mainstream	504-506 Harrow Road	Paddington	W9 3QA
Tesco Classic Metro	22-25 Bedford Street	London	WC2E 9EQ
TCG Co-op City	Golden Cross House	London	WC2R 0RG
Notting Hill Gate Library	1 Pembridge Square	Notting Hill	W2 4EW
Kensal Library	20 Golborne Road		W10 5PF

Westminster & Pimlico News pick up points

Sainsbury's Store	99 Wilton Road	Pimlico	SW1V 1DT
Tesco Metro	18-28 Warwick Way	Westminster	SW1V 1RX
Tesco Classic Metro	Dean Street	Westminster	W1D 3RS
Tesco Classic Metro	10-16 Goodge Street	Westminster	W1T 2QB
Tesco Metro	90-100 Edgware Road	Westminster	W2 2EA
TCG Co-op City	19-21 Store Street	Westminster	WC1E 7DB

Chelsea News pick up points

Chelsea Library	Chelsea Old Town Hall	Chelsea	SW3 5EZ
Chelsea Sports Centre	Chelsea Manor Street	Chelsea	SW3 5PL

LWN NEWS FROM KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA editorial@londonweeklynews.co.uk

Council forced to make another round of budget cuts

KENSINGTON and Chelsea residents, council staff and services dependant on help or pay from the borough council should tighten their belts – as proposals for council spending in the next year stand to see it slashed by more than £15 million.

The council is being forced to make cuts for the fifth year running after revealing that its hand-outs from the Government are drying up and it faces at least three more years of going short.

The council, which has repeatedly defended a need for good housekeeping in bleak years of austerity, has warned that by 2018 its reserves will plunge by a loss of £81 million.

The stark future is laid out in draft budget proposals for 2015-16 which have been posted on the council's website for public consultation and comment.

In its argument for the cuts to come, the council says it has no choice but to bite the bullet and curb spending.

"Further reductions in the council's grant from central government are certain for at least three years beyond 2015-16," says the budget report.

"The council remains of the view that the reductions in grant to local authorities represent a permanent loss of income – it will not be recovered."

As the council is freezing council tax for the sixth year running – maintaining the rates as the fifth lowest in England – in order for it to continue operating services, spending cuts are inevitable, especially as its rainy day kitty is running out and by 2018 it will be down by nearing half of last year's balance.

In 2014 the royal borough had £186 million in its reserves account at the bank – it says by 2018 this will have plummeted to £105 million.

"Given the modest contribution that can be made from increasing the council's income, efforts to balance the budget have to focus mainly on reducing spending," says the council.

But it claims: "This is feasible, often without damaging the services to residents."

In an expansive section of the budget report that details numerous council costs, interesting figures are revealed, including:

- That it costs the council £803 every week to look after one elderly person in a residential care home.
- The annual cost of sweeping 100 metres of any street is £3,436.
- The cost of trying to get one person to stop smoking is £438 per year.
- The annual cost of maintaining one street light is £114.
- The cost to the council of "purchasing" one police constable is £32,500 – which is only half the actual price. The other half is paid by the Met. Under the council's contract with the Met, it is "purchasing" one inspector, four sergeants and 36 constables.
- The council pays for 29,441 people in the borough to have a freedom pass and 2,205 people to have a blue disabled parking badge.
- The council looks after 7,000 trees in the borough.
- More than £5,000,000 is spent by the council each year providing sexual health services.
- More than £6,000,000 is spent by the council each year providing substance misuse services.
- The council makes 24,807 pest control visits a year.
- The council deals with more than 10,000 noise and nuisance complaints each year.
- Paying housing benefit costs the council £140 million a year.

The council's proposed cuts for 2015-16 are as follows:

Adult Social Care – down by £3,908,000.
Children's Services – down by £1,950,000.
Environment, Leisure and Residents' Services – down by £1,522,000.
Housing Services – down by £691,000.
Library, Archive and Heritage Services – down by £186,000.
Planning and Borough Development – down by £1,079,000.
Transport and Technical Services - down by £2,481,000.
Corporate Services – down by £3,681,000.
Total cuts for 2015-16 - £15,498,000.
For a detailed breakdown of the council's proposed cuts and savings, go to www.rbk.gov.uk

Encouraging young voters

YOUNG adults of Kensington and Chelsea are being urged by the Borough Council to sign up this week to have their say in the way that the country is run.

With a General Election looming in May, could-be young voters are being encouraged to realise that their vote counts.

The Council says 16 to 24-year-olds are the largest under-represented group on the electoral register and the Government is trying to change this.

As part of a national initiative to boost the number people participating in elections and registering to vote, the 'Bite the Ballot' campaign is running National Voter Registration Day this week on Thursday, February 5.

To find out more go to www.nvrd.co.uk

The Royal Borough is holding roadshows on Wednesday at Sainsbury's on Cromwell Road, SW7 from 9am to 4pm and on Thursday at the V&A from 10am to 4.30pm.

If you are entitled to be on the Electoral Register but are not currently, you can register by going to www.gov.uk/register-to-vote

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THE paper serving the HEART of London
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NEWS FROM NICK ...

with Nicholas Paget-Brown, Leader of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

Remembering birthdays and anniversaries in 2015

THIS is going to be something of a bumper year for anniversaries.

For one thing Magna Carta is 800 years old this year. And if that alone isn't worth a column, we also have the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, the consequences of which are still being played out today.

2015 will also mark the 50th anniversary of the death of TS Eliot who was not only a giant of 20th century poetry but also a resident. He lived in Kensington Court Gardens, just off the High Street, which was a great place to live even then, despite the lack of a Nando's.

And it is also the 50th anniversary of the death of Sir Winston Churchill who for many, myself included, is one of the greatest ever Britons. Churchill was a Freeman of this borough and spent his final days at 28 Hyde Park Gate near Queen's Gate, a blue plaque marks the spot. You can actually see the great man being given his Freemanship on the Council's website.

More parochial perhaps but still significant, Portobello Road will be 150 years old in 2015. And there's one other birthday I would like to mention: the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea will itself be 50 this year.

The union of Chelsea with Kensington had a difficult beginning, and the truth is that our borough's motto – what a good thing it is to dwell together in unity – was in 1965 probably chosen more as a hopeful symbol of the peace between the burghers of Kensington and the burghers of Chelsea than the positive message about diversity that it is today.

In the Royal Borough's 50 years a lot has happened, we have had outrages, tragedies and setbacks but we have also made a lot of progress. Crime is low. People from all walks of life rub along well together. Our streets are well maintained. We have beautiful architecture and wonderful open spaces.

Our schools are excellent and our exam results outstanding. In short Kensington and Chelsea is a great place to live. That the Royal Borough has so much going for it is no accident of course but the result of generations of effort and investment by many different people and organisations, chief amongst them the Council but we still face many challenges. The Council has recently published a document setting out how we are going to face up to them, it's called Ambitious for Tomorrow and you can read that on our website too.

Finally 2015 itself is likely to become a notable year in itself. I think that most of us recognise that this year's general election is more significant than most. Right now our election team is getting ready for it and making sure the election register is up to date. If you want to see some candidate or other meet their Waterloo (1815) you need to be on the register. Again you can find out more on our website www.rbkc.gov.uk

THE blue plaque that marks the former home of Winston Churchill at 28 Hyde Park Gate

THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA

To contact the Leader of the Council, Cllr Nick Paget-Brown, email theleader@rbkc.gov.uk

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LWN

LONDON WIDE

Better support for bereaved families across London

SERVICES for bereaved people and families across Greater London will be improved following Justice Minister Simon Hughes' demand that capital's coroners offer increased out-of-hours provision.

Mr Hughes, who has national policy responsibility for coroners, this week met with senior figures from London councils, the police and the Chief Coroner, HHJ Peter Thornton QC to push for the changes.

Having better out-of-hours services will benefit all bereaved people, but is particularly important for certain people of faith, including Jews and Muslims whose beliefs require burials to take place within the shortest possible time after the death.

Following a meeting at Parliament this week, the councils and the police agreed to draw up proposals to improve out-of-hours services across London from the beginning of the new municipal year in April. The plans will include improvements to the way people are able to contact coroners during working hours.

Justice Minister Simon Hughes said: "Deaths of family and friends already mean heartache for the bereaved. I want to make sure that, where coroners need to be involved, this does not make things any more difficult for those responsible for arrangements after a death.

"Out of hours services can make a real difference for a lot of people and I am pleased that London councils and the police have agreed to come together to fix this important issue."

The Ministry of Justice has carried out significant reforms in the past two years to improve coroner services across England and Wales and increase consistency between areas.

This has included creating a new national code of practice - setting out what service and standards bereaved people can expect from coroners - and appointing the first ever Chief Coroner of England and Wales (His Honour Judge Peter Thornton QC) to oversee the coroner system.

JUSTICE Minister Simon Hughes

Other measures include:

- Requiring coroners to be subject to new training requirements.
- Requiring inquests to be completed within six months of the date on which the coroner is made aware of the death, unless there are good reasons not to.
- Requiring coroners to notify those who are bereaved within a week of setting the date for the inquest.
- Coroners having to report any cases that last more than a year to the Chief Coroner, and giving reasons for any delays.

With Right to Buy, you could now get a bigger discount towards buying the home you live in.

Have you been a council tenant for at least 5 years? If so, you could be eligible for a discount of up to £77,000, or £102,700 if you live in London. So is now the right time to think about buying your home?

To find out more about Right to Buy and whether you're eligible for a discount, visit the Right to Buy website or call one of our Advisers:

www.communities.gov.uk/therighttobuy

0300 123 0913

Department for Communities and Local Government

Your Right to Buy

FOR COUNCIL AND HOUSING ASSOCIATION TENANTS

Council and housing association tenants Are you up to date with Right to Buy?

Right to Buy is the scheme that helps eligible council and housing association tenants buy their home by offering a discount on the purchase price.

Since the scheme was refreshed in April 2012 the discounts have increased. Currently, eligible tenants can get up to 70% off the cost of their house or flat up to a maximum cash discount of £77,000 in England, and £102,700 if you live in London.Each year these discounts will increase by the rate of inflation.

Since 2012 nearly 30,000 people in England have become homeowners through the Right to Buy scheme. Could this be the right time for you - or somebody you know - to join them?

Homeownership is not the right choice for everyone and potential owners need to be sure they can afford it. But homeownership also brings many benefits such as freedom to make changes, a sense of pride and an investment for the future.

Receipts from additional Right to Buy sales gointo building new affordable housing.

Who qualifies for the Right to Buy?

IF YOU CAN ANSWER 'YES' TO THESE STATEMENTS...
I am a council tenant (or) I was a council tenant when my home was sold to my current landlord
I have been a tenant for at least 5 years
I don't live in sheltered housing or other housing particularly suitable for elderly or disabled people
...YOU COULD BE ELIGIBLE FOR A DISCOUNT OF UP TO £102,700

Tenants are likely to be eligible to buy their current home if they can answer 'yes' to the following questions:

- *Are you currently a council tenant, or were you living in your home when the council transferred it to another landlord (housing association)?*
- *Have you been a council or housing association tenant for 5 years or more?*
- *Can you confirm that you do not live in sheltered housing or other housing designed for elderly or disabled people?*

In addition, tenants need to be free from legal problems with debt or outstanding possession orders, and their home isn't due to be demolished.

If you don't qualify at the moment, keep an eye on news about Right to Buy as the Government is hoping to make further changes to eligibility later this year.

What to do next

If you want to find out more about buying your home and whether you are eligible for a discount through Right to Buy, have a look at our website. There is an easy-to-use calculator to help you work out if you can afford to buy and lots of practical tips about the buying process.

If you decide to go ahead you will need to fill in the application form and take the process forward with your landlord.

Support from start to finish

The Government's Right to Buy Agent service offers free and impartial advice on Right to Buy.

If you decide that home ownership is the right choice for you, the advisers will help you throughout the process from applying to completing. The advisers can provide information on finding a mortgage, appointing a solicitor and arranging a survey.

If you are midway through buying and have a problem, get in touch with the Agent service and they can advise you.

The advisers are available from Monday to Friday, 8am until 6pm.
You can phone them on 0300 123 0913.

For more information:
Website:www.communities.gov.uk/therighttobuy
Phone: 0300 123 0913
Email: enquiry@righttobuyagent.org.uk

A GRAND START TO 2015!

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Work on 'Crossrail for Bikes' could begin in March

FINAL plans have been set out for the construction of Europe's longest substantially-segregated urban cycleways.

The proposals form the centrepiece of Mayor Boris Johnson's £913 million commitment to get more Londoners on their bikes.

The revised plans go to the Transport for London board next week. Subject to their approval, construction of the routes will begin in March.

Two continuous cycle routes, almost completely separated from traffic, will cross central London from east to west and north to south, opening up thousands of new journey opportunities.

Acting on concerns about delays caused to traffic by the east-west route, the final plans now retain two westbound traffic lanes on Upper and Lower Thames Street and Victoria Embankment, while entirely preserving the continuous, kerb-segregated cycle lanes and junctions.

These changes reduce the whole-route traffic delay in the morning peak hour, the worst affected time, by 60 per cent compared to previous proposals.

The Mayor said: "We have done one of the biggest consultation exercises in TfL's history. We have listened, and now we will act. Overwhelmingly, Londoners wanted these routes, and wanted them delivered to the high standard we promised. I intend to keep that promise.

"But I have also listened to those concerned about the east-west route's impact on traffic. Thanks to the skill of TfL's engineers and traffic managers, we have made changes to our original plans which keep the segregated cycle track and junctions, while taking out much less of the route's motor traffic capacity – and so causing much shorter delays.

"I now look forward to the transformation that these planned routes will bring – not just for people who cycle now, but for the thousands of new cyclists they will attract. Getting more people on their bikes will reduce pressure on the road, bus and rail networks, cut pollution, and improve life for everyone, whether or not they cycle themselves."

An overwhelming number of people – 21,500 - responded to TfL's nine-week consultation on the proposals, with 84 per cent overall in support.

More than a hundred major businesses on or near the routes, including Unilever, Royal Bank of Scotland, Deloitte and Orange, also publicly backed the scheme, as did all parties on the London Assembly. Opinion polling showed that Londoners as a whole backed the scheme by 64 per cent to 28 per cent.

But others expressed concern at traffic modelling figures predicting the scheme would cause a delay for motorists of about 16 minutes, in the busiest morning peak hour, on the worst affected journey – between Limehouse Link and Hyde Park Corner. This journey is still the most heavily affected by the scheme, but the changes announced this week mean that the delay is now reduced from 16 to just over six minutes in the busiest morning peak hour.

Advanced traffic management

Delays caused to other motor journeys have also been reduced by the changes. TfL is putting in advanced traffic management measures to assist with the management of these delays.

The planned east-west route will start at Tower Hill, where it will connect to the existing Cycle Superhighway 3 which runs east to Canary Wharf and Barking. From Tower Hill, the new route runs along Lower and Upper Thames Street, Victoria Embankment, across Parliament Square, to Hyde Park Corner and through Hyde Park, across Lancaster Gate and up Westbourne Terrace. As originally announced, the section through Hyde Park will be consulted on next month and the second phase of the scheme, on the Westway flyover to Acton, will be consulted on later this year.

Apart from a low-traffic tunnel adjacent to the Upper Thames Street tunnel, never proposed for segregation, the new superhighway is entirely physically segregated largely with bi-directional cycle track. The amount of segregation will in fact increase slightly under the new proposals, with the superhighway routed away from a residential street at Lancaster Gate and a more direct, segregated route provided instead.

Most of the improved traffic performance comes from relatively small changes to the plans which will remove key pinchpoints. On the section between Tower Hill and Parliament Square, the road was originally planned to be reduced from four to two traffic lanes, one in each direction, at these pinchpoints - Tower Hill, Blackfriars underpass and Temple station - to fit in a 4-metre separated cycle track.

The design of key junctions at these pinchpoints to accommodate this made it necessary to hold westbound traffic at Tower Hill, delaying vehicles coming in from the east on The Highway. Delays on The Highway will be substantially less after the changes to the scheme.

The changes narrow the segregated track to about 3 metres over a short distance, in the underpass and at Temple station. This and other changes will mean that the final plans now retain an extra traffic lane – two westbound traffic lanes - throughout the route.

TfL has also acted on concerns expressed by some stakeholders about banned turns and road closures on the east-west route. The final plans no longer propose a banned left turn into Fish Street Hill in the City, or a road closure at Horse Guards Road in Westminster.

■ ARTIST'S impression of Parliament Square with the new 'Crossrail for Cycles'

There will also be improved loading, disabled parking and motorcycle parking on Victoria Embankment, compared to the original design. Again, these changes do not have any effect on the provision for cyclists.

The route in the Lancaster Gate area is being moved from a residential side street, Bathurst Street, to avoid the Hyde Park Stables. A segregated track will be provided on the main road, Westbourne Street, instead.

At the request of some stakeholders, TfL considered providing only painted cycle lanes or "light segregation" on the Embankment and Upper Thames Street instead of the planned bi-directional fully-segregated track. A paint-only or semi-segregated scheme would have required two cycle lanes, one in each direction. Because of this, TfL engineers concluded that it would have taken a similar amount of roadspace and had a similar impact on traffic as the fully-segregated scheme now proposed, while providing significantly fewer benefits for cyclists and pedestrians.

The planned north-south route will run from Elephant & Castle to King's Cross, with full segregation on St George's Road, across St George's Circus, Blackfriars Road, Blackfriars Bridge, new bridge street and Farringdon Street to Stonecutter Street. The east-west and north-south routes interchange with each other at Blackfriars.

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JFK's former home to become mega-mansion

A LONDON property formerly lived in by John F. Kennedy is set to be transformed into a £150 million mega-mansion and one of the capital's finest homes.

The late President Kennedy lived in 13-14 Princes Gate, pictured, an imposing property overlooking Hyde Park in Knightsbridge, as a young man in the 1930s.

It was used by the US government as an ambassador's home at the time and was later owned by the Royal College of General Practitioners.

But it was sold in 2010 for around £35m – and now developers Viridis Real Estate hope to convert it into a stunning family home.

Plans submitted to Westminster Council show a 30,000 sq. ft. home with a huge basement which includes a swimming pool and underground car park.

Estate agents estimate it could be worth as much as £150 million.

The lower ground floor of 13-14 Princes Gate will be one of the most impressive in London.

Plans boast a swimming pool, children's pool, jacuzzi, kitchen, wine cellar, staff quarters and a gym with two changing rooms.

Beneath the vast leisure complex will be underground parking for four cars.

The ground floor will be made up of a formal room and dining room, an ambassadorial study and a huge lobby. Cars will be driven into a separate entrance before being lowered to the basement via a large lift.

The first floor has two large rooms for entertaining and a super-sized reception room stretches across the whole front of the property.

Further up and there are seven bedroom suites, another kitchen, a playroom and guest sitting room. All floors can be reached by either stairs or the lift.

Viridis Real Estate submitted plans for the development – which also included transforming 15 Princes Gate into an 11,000 sq/ft family home – in 2011.

Planning permission was granted, but plans were resubmitted earlier this month.

Becky Fatemi, managing director of luxury estate agent Rokstone, believes 13-14 Princes Gate has the potential to be "one of London's most outstanding super-prime mansions".

She said: "If refurbished and converted back into a luxury residence it could rival London's other palatial private residences such as Dudley House or 1-3 Cornwall Terrace.

"The property directly overlooks Hyde Park and it has the benefit of private gardens and terraces."

The property was originally built in the late 1840s to designs by the architect Harvey Lonsdale Elmes.

It was the residence of the merchant and investment bankers Junius Spencer Morgan and his son, John Pierpont (JP) Morgan, who offered the house to the US government as ambassadorial residence.

John F Kennedy lived there in the late 1930s when his father, Joseph, was the ambassador in London. In 1955, the embassy sold the house, which was subsequently the headquarters of the Independent Television Authority and, from 1962, of the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP).

The college was evacuated in 1980 when the infamous Iranian embassy siege took place next door.

FOR RESIDENTS AND VISITORS

London WEEKLY News

ISSUE 9 | PICK UP A FREE COPY | Thursday, February 5th 2015

Prince Philip - Queen's 'best friend and guide'

...AND PATRON TO 800 DIFFERENT GROUPS

By Geoff Baker

LWN ROYAL SPECIAL

It is time for a reappraisal of Prince Philip, for too long the whipping-boy of the trolls of the politically-correct who seem to think that saying boo to a goose is a hate crime.

In a Britain where political leaders compete for who among them can be the most timid and beige, where twittish Tweeting has replaced great oratory and mavericks have been superseded by lauded nerds, our cowed attitude towards the 'sayings of Philip' has increasingly marked out this once thundering land as a place where the meek shall inhibit the earth.

This year Prince Philip will be 94 and yet at an age when watching *Countdown* counts as activity for many of his contemporaries, he is still giving ear and assistance to the more than 800 organisations of which he is patron. Consider the mail and requests generated by fronting 800 varied bodies - demanding attention for at least three different organisations a day, every day of every working week.

On one day alone this month, Prince Philip will perform royal duties at *five* different functions at Buckingham Palace, all in one day at an age when a lot of people can't even walk.

Knee-jerking tweets

Outraged of Australia is the latest to have a pop at the prince. Following Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott's decision to award Philip a knighthood in recognition of his public service, journalists knee-jerking to the Tweets of non-journalists set to serving up all manner of troll-pandering indignation.

Despite Mr Abbott's pithy and pertinent observation that the professional media pays too much time lackeying to the electronic graffiti which is the medium of its idiot brother, social media, once again it prompted the trotting out of articles listing 'the gaffes of Philip'.

But were they all really gaffes, or were they uncomfortable truths that sit awkwardly in our pallid and homogenised culture?

When Prince Philip said in the Sixties 'British women can't cook', there was uproar. But you know what? He was right, by and large they couldn't then. Neither could the men, who were worse. They can cook now and cook brilliantly but back then the general standard of British cuisine was abysmal; ask

■ **NEWLY-KNIGHTED by the Australian Government, Prince Philip pictured in Perth as part of the Queen's State Visit in 2011.** *Photo by TIM ROOKER/REX*

Inside London's new weekly

Where to see a royal - page 14

Photo by David Parker/Associated News/REX

Princess Royal visits most exclusive club in the world

...see page 4

Westminster & Pimlico News (established 1857) ◆ Chelsea News (established 1857) ◆ Kensington News (established 1869)

ROYAL LONDON

The Duke of Edinburgh's human touch

Philip: The Queen's best friend

■ FROM PAGE ONE

any of us who lived through that decade of everything brown on a plate.

When Prince Philip was asked in 1967 if he would like to visit the Soviet Union and he ruffled Foreign Office feathers by replying, 'I would like to go very much, although the bastards murdered half of my family', you know what? They did, the Romanovs were murdered by Lenin's men – including his great-aunt Princess Elizabeth, who was thrown down a mine 66 ft deep by the Soviet secret police who then chucked in hand grenades after her.

When, in 1986, Philip told the World Wildlife-Fund, 'if it has got for legs and is not a table, if it has two wings and flies but is not an aeroplane, and if it swims but is not a submarine, the Cantonese will eat it', it may have caused panic attacks among those wanting to expand trade relations with China but, tough, he was speaking the truth – at the time the Chinese ate black bear paws, tiger penis, civet cats, owls, rhino horn and salamanders. As it is, some are still partial to this day to eating cats and dogs.

■ ALWAYS AT HER SIDE: The Queen and Prince Philip on their last State Visit to Australia in 20111

Photon by T IM ROOKE/REX

Campaigning

Curious, isn't it, that Philip is frequently knocked for what he says but rarely praised for what he does? For instance, who among the appeasement monkeys stepped forward and saluted the WWF which, under his 20-year presidency, changed the thinking of the planet in campaigning for the protection of endangered species?

Who, in knocking him for being out of touch, or as the historian David Starkey put it, the 'HRH Victor Meldrew', considers the value of his Duke Of Edinburgh's Award scheme which has helped some 8 million young people in the UK and 140 other countries since he set it up in 1956? And I don't recall David Starkey turning down the CBE he got in the 2007 Queen's Birthday Honours.

But there is much more to Philip than his championing of youth, his wildlife work, his many patronages of good causes and his free spirit that propelled him to still fly aircraft into his seventies, and principal among it is this – as the longest-serving, oldest-ever spouse of a reigning British monarch, he is The Queen's best friend.

In 2012 on the occasion of her Diamond Jubilee, The Queen acknowledged that when she called him her 'constant strength and guide'.

'He is the only man in the world who treats The Queen as another human being,' her former private secretary Lord Charteris once noted, tellingly.

Bringing that human touch to such a scrutinised institution has been no easy task and we often forget the man behind the titles; the grandfather, for instance, who took a wise and compassionate hand protecting Prince William and Prince Harry after the tragedy of the death of Diana.

According to the royal author Gyles Brandreth, the two young princes were uncertain whether they should walk behind their mother's coffin at her funeral. Knowing that later they might regret a decision not to, their grandfather sat down with the just 15-year-old William and said 'If I walk, will you walk with me?'

For the best part of a century and longer as a husband than any before him, the much-criticised Prince Philip has boosted and encouraged the standing of the Royal Family in many ways. They should have named him Fillip.

■ ACCEPTING GIFTS: The Duke of Edinburgh on walkabout in Melborne on the Queen's State Visit in 2011.

Photo by REX

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WHERE TO SEE YOUR FAVOURITE ROYAL

FULL details of future and recent events in the ever-busy diaries of the many members of The Royal Family are available from the official website www.royal.gov.uk but here's the London schedule for the week ahead for Where To See A Royal.

February 4th

The Princess Royal, as Patron of the War Horse Ride 2014, will attend a reception at the Cavalry and Guards Club, Piccadilly W1.

The Princess Royal, as President of the British Olympic Association, will hold a dinner at St James's Palace.

Princess Alexandra, as Patron of St Mary's Convent and Nursing Home, will open new homes at Burlington Lane W4.

February 5th

The Princess Royal, as Patron of Catch22, will attend a Realising Ambition seminar at Great George Street SW1.

The Princess Royal will attend The Royal Navy Club 250th anniversary Founders' Day dinner at Old Royal Naval College SE10.

Princess Alexandra, as Patron of the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art, will host a reception at St James's Palace.

February 10th

The Queen will give a reception at Buckingham Palace to celebrate the patronages and affiliations of the **Earl and Countess of Wessex.**

The Earl of Wessex, as trustee of the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award Foundation, will attend a meeting at St Matthew Street W1.

The Princess Royal, as Past Master of the Worshipful Company of Butchers, will attend the City Food Lecture at The Guildhall EC2.

The Duke Of Kent, as President of the Royal Institution of Great Britain, will attend the annual fellows' dinner at Albemarle Street W1.

ROYAL LONDON

Princess Royal's disreet engagement

The most exclusive club in town

THIS Wednesday the Princess Royal will leave Buckingham Palace to make a low-key visit to an address in SW12 in her capacity as the Patron of the most discreet and exclusive club in Britain - the Special Forces Club.

But Princess Anne will not be driven to the unmarked door in Knightsbridge which fronts the club formed 70 years ago for members of the Special Operations Executive, Britain's WW2 secret agents, and their comrades who served in the Resistance movements in occupied countries.

Instead, in her capacity as the royal figurehead of this most secret of groups, she will go to an address which is a care home for elderly Jewish people.

Buckingham Palace is giving few details about the visit, but the speculation is that Princess Anne will be visiting one of our wartime spies, the brave and largely-unsung heroes who were ordered by Churchill to "set Europe ablaze" and whose courageous deeds were reckoned by Eisenhower to have shortened the war by six months.

It is easy to see why such a tough group as the SOE should choose the Princess Royal as their Patron. She too is famously discreet, and famously brave – as evidenced by her great retort, "not bloody likely", when she defied a gunman who tried to kidnap her in Pall Mall in 1974 after shooting her bodyguard.

Her patronage is also fitting because it was the bravery of many women who became SOE agents that helped to hasten the end of the war.

Fifty five women were sent behind enemy lines by SOE in the war, parachuted onto isolated fields to meet up with the Resistance, to get crucial information, often to blow something up, and then to try get back to Britain again.

Of the 55, 15 were captured by the Germans, tortured to try to make them talk, and then executed.

Some of the women SOE did achieve the recognition that they all deserved – for instance Odette Sansom Hallowes, who was caught and tortured by the Germans with a red-hot poker and sent to Ravensburck concentration camp for execution.

By GEOFF BAKER

Fortunately, due to her defiantly sticking to a cover story that she was married to Churchill's nephew, she survived the war and was awarded the George Cross.

Another great heroine of Britain's of most elite secret army was Violette Szabo (nee Bushell), who lived in Pembridge Villas, Notting Hill, before volunteering to join the SOE after her SOE husband Etienne Szabo was killed leading a diversionary attack at the start of the Battle Of El Alamein.

On her second mission to occupied France, to coordinate sabotage by the Resistance to hamper German attempts to repel the Normandy landings, she too was caught – but not before a determined fight in which she single-handedly held off a German assault in a 30-minute gun battle, providing covering fire so that her Resistance colleague could escape, until she ran out of ammunition.

Violette Szabo was also brutally tortured and sent to Ravensbruck, where, at the age of 23, she was executed; shot in the back of the head by an aptly-ranked SS-Rottenfuhrer Schult. She too was awarded the George Cross and her courage was later immortalised in the BAFTA-winning film, "Carve Her Name With Pride".

But what of the other women of SOE? Some of their story is revealed in an excellent exhibition at The Imperial War Museum, which includes remarkable photographs and exhibits including a suitcase radio set that the agents carried into France, spies' weapons like the nail dagger and suppressed Sten gun, a petrol can which contained a limpet mine and a cyanide suicide pill which they wore around their necks.

Files on some other members of SOE are still closed and kept top secret at the National Archieves, even 70 years after the end of the war. Enquiries for the HS9 file – the SOE file - of 21-year-old operative Fanny Elizabeth Davidson, for instance, are met with an official rebuff that it will not be opened until 2025.

"The Freedom of Information Centre receives more requests for HS9 documents than for any other class of document," said the National Archives' Jonathan Cole.

However, another file on another SOE agent was recently opened and these HS9 documents on Agent Chilver reveal that Special Ops worked into many a mysterious way - as Marie Christine Chilver was the Executive's temptress-in-chief, an agent provocatrice known by the code-name Fifi, whose job was to discover if agents could be persuaded by desire to reveal their secrets.

> **'It is easy to see why such a tough group as the SOE should choose the Princess Royal as their Patron. She too is famously discreet, and famously brave'**

"Fifi is a legend of SOE, a symbol of seduction – not surprising as she is said to have bedded trainee agents to find out if they talked in their sleep," says Mr Cole.

Although the SOE trained their student agents thoroughly at their school at Beaulieu in Hampshire, the top brass needed to know whether an agent sent into the field would talk, and so they laid traps to test their men – including the temptation to spill the beans of their true identity to a beautiful woman such as Fifi.

"Fifi was sprung on the students by surprise," says Mr Cole.

"Expecting to meet a contact during the schemes, they were met instead by a stunning blonde, apparently a French journalist called Christine Collard, offering them help.

"Using her unusual gifts of intelligence, courage and assessment of character, Fifi conversed with the students at length and listened carefully. The more information she got from her 'victim' the better – or rather, the worse for them.

"A brush with Fifi could mean a promising student's downfall. Jose Tinchant, a talented young Belgian known as 'Tas', was well-regarded by his instructors until Fifi came along. After their first meeting she reported, 'by the evening I had learned practically all there was to know about him', and SOE ended his employment."

Fifi's abilities to test an agent's ability to keep to his cover story proved invaluable to SOE and doubtless saved lives. SOE valued her hugely and its head of security John Senter remarked that 'she is a woman of outstanding capacity'.

After the war, Christine Chilver maintained her low profile, retiring with another SOE intelligence officer, a widow Jean Felgate, to the Wye Valley, from where she campaigned for animal rights. She died in 2007, her friend Jean was the only mourner at her funeral.

She lived and died unrecognised, the SOE way, but she was remembered by those who knew her, says Jonathan Cole, "as one of life's real good people". Perhaps on Wednesday, the Princess Royal is off to meet another.

A history of the Special Operations Executive is on display at The Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Road SE1. For more information, www.iwm.org.uk

■ **THE Princess Royal unveils a statue of WW2 Special Operations heroine Noor Inaya Khan at Gordon Square in London in 2012** *Photo by David Parker/Associated News/REX*

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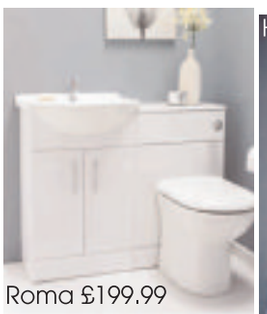
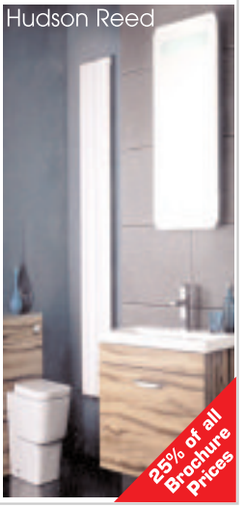




SHOWBIZ SPECIAL

EastEnders celebrating 30 years

‘Cor! Stinks in ‘ere, dunnit’

by Geoff Baker

IT WAS 7 pm on Tuesday February 19th 1985 and with those words a TV legend began 30 years ago, as not-yet-dirty Den’s red basketball boot kicked in the door on Reg Cox’s flat and the BBC battered its way into the war of the soaps with a saga called EastEnders.

On Breakfast Time the next morning a TV crew fed back to the studio a live report from the real East End for their reaction. “I won’t be giving up Coronation Street”, one viewer told the BBC1 cameras.

But she did. Seventeen million people watched that first episode, egged on by the biggest publicity campaign the BBC had ever mounted, and British television was changed forever.

In less than two years, the audience had grown to the 30,150,000 who watched Den deliver divorce papers to Angie on Christmas Day 1986, and the BBC had a monster hit.

But it could have been so very different. Behind the scenes in the tale of our most-loved soap lie anguished twists and turns worthy of being an Albert Square storyline in themselves.

For starters, the original idea was not for a Cockney caper at all. When EastEnders creators Julia Smith and Tony Holland were first charged by their bosses with creating a soap that would changed the BBC’s fortunes, their first idea was an everyday story of life in a shopping arcade, maybe set in Birmingham.

But Bull Ringers, or whatever the Brummie saga would have been called, never got beyond the first script and it was rejected as it would be too expensive to build a set.

The next idea was about a mobile-home park. Caravanners? Did that sound like packing the punch that would drag millions away from their dinner to find out what would happen next?

Producer Julia Smith thought not.

“There was nothing wrong with the idea, there were several elements that were interesting and original, but it had no mileage. Where would it go? Great fun as a six-part series but fifty two weeks of the year? That was stretching it wafer thin, the format would surely be exhausted in a couple of months,” she recalled later.

Jonathan Powell, the then recently-appointed head of BBC drama series, felt the same. No, he said as he rejected Caravanners, “we should be doing something about *London - today!”*

And so EastEnders began, but not without a lot of drama and heartache – and no EastEnders story is sadder than that of the actress Jean Fennell, for whom huge fame and success so very nearly could have been hers.

Jean Fennell was born in the East End and was recommended for the key role as Angie Watts by EastEnders founding director Tony Robinson.

“Jean was genuine East End,” Julia Smith recalled, “She had something in her personality that was quite unique. She combined vitality with vulnerability and an almost-desperate nervous energy, all of which was perfect for Angie.”

Jean was given the part, one of the first actors to be cast in what they were all told was going to be ‘a gigantic enterprise’.

“It was intended on the one hand to help reverse the Corporation’s controversially-negative image in the press, while at the same time taking on the cut and thrust challenge of popular television, an audience the BBC had always found it hard to capture,” said Julia.

Ludicrous outfit

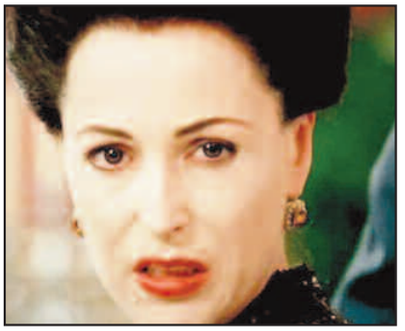
As Jean concentrated on her character, the BBC built the permanent set at its newly-bought Elstree Studios, the rest of the cast was hired, a press call to reveal the important new soap was held on the set – Jean was ill that day and could not attend it – and with just weeks to go to the first broadcast, the show on which the entire future of the BBC depended began to film its first scenes.

The night time scenes featured Angie coming out of the Queen Vic. But Julia Smith stopped the record after taking one look at Jean in her costume of a long black dress with a plunging V at the back.

“For a guv’nor’s lady in a fairly tatty East End pub the outfit was ludicrous. It had to be changed,” Julia recalled.

“But not before a slanging match that was to go down in history between producer, actress and costume designer”.

Julia threatened to pull the dress off Jean’s back if necessary. The next day, first rehearsals for the first studio shoot began with Den, Angie and adopted daughter Sharon bitching in the pub. Julia watched the scene being rehearsed three times and retired to her office; something was wrong.



■ **THE ANGIE THAT NEVER WAS: Actress Jean Fennell was devasted when dropped from the role**

■ **THE ANGIE THAT WAS - Anita Dobson, “a tigress who had the purr of a kitten” who went on to become a household name**

“Angie did not work and all of my years of experience in the business told me that it never would. Every so often it happens that an actor, no matter how good they are, is wrong for the part. And that was what had happened with Jean Fennell, she had been mis-cast. It was not her fault, it was ours. Try as she might, Jean could not bring Angie to life because what was in Angie was not in her.”

Julia Smith summoned Jean to her office. Her co-creator Tony Holland decided to take a walk.

“I didn’t have the stomach to stay and eavesdrop on what might prove to be an ugly confrontation,” he later recalled, “But when the noise came, I still heard it more than two blocks away.”

“It wasn’t a scream, it wasn’t a wail. When it happened it was more like a roar of anguish that built in intensity and volume for what seemed like hours,” said Julia.

Poleaxed

“Jean Fennell begged to stay with the show. Her tears were real, her words that I couldn’t do this to her; it wasn’t human. She’d been out of work for so long. She’d been waiting for years for a part like Angie, for a show like EastEnders, for a break.

“She said I must think of what sort of life I’d be sending her back to, I couldn’t do that to her. It was that black dress, wasn’t it? What had she done wrong? What was wrong with her Angie?

“Apart from my opening speech telling her that she was being dropped from the show, I didn’t say another word. I was as poleaxed as Jean and was wishing that I’d become a hairdresser or a vet, anything but a television producer.”

Left with the major problem of not having a leading lady for the soap that was then just weeks from starting, Julia brooded and remembered an actress she had worked with at stage school, and she sent for Anita Dobson to come for a read-through.

“She didn’t just speak the words, she spat them. Her Angie was a cat, or a tigress. Yet her high-pitched tone could be instantly replaced by the purr of a kitten; playful, yet innocent and in constant danger of being hurt. This was the Angie we had wanted all along.”

Fely wretched

As EastEnders began its storm-trooper march to the top of the TV ratings, poor Jean Fennell could only watch as Angie Watts, the part that ‘should’ have been hers, became the most popular character in Britain. Day after day after day, Anita Dobson’s face dominated the front pages; wherever Jean looked there was Anita looking out from the racks of magazine covers in every supermarket.

Jean Fennell must have felt wretched, and she never got close to making it ever again. And after 26 years of enduring the pain and regret – during which time she saw Anita go on to leave EastEnders and star in 43 productions *and* marry Queen guitarist Brian May while she could only turn to teaching acting to make ends meet – she died in 2011, aged just 59, after battling with cancer for 10 years.

Jean Fennell is not the only one who will miss EastEnders’ 30th birthday celebrations. Julia Smith, shamefully fired by the BBC for the failure of her next soap, “Eldorado”, died in Kensington in 1997 and ten years later Tony Holland died too.

But many have died, actors and characters, since EastEnders began. Most famously perhaps, Dirty Den died twice – once when he was shot by an assassin in 1989 and again in 2010 when he was clunked over the head with a doorstop by his other wife, Chrissie Watts.

Although Den was first buried under concrete in the cellar of the Queen Vic and then dug up and buried proper in a graveyard, some years ago Leslie Grantham, who played Den, hinted at a Lazarus-like return.

“Who knows? Maybe I could come back again?” he said in a TV interview.

What? The ghost of Do-It-Again Den making a shock return for the 30th anniversary episode? Pull the other one.

But then, with EastEnders, you never really know. And it would cause a stink….

EastEnders 30th birthday. Thursday February 19th, BBC1 7.30 pm.

■ **WINNERS AGAIN: The current EastEnders cast after being voted most popular soap at theNational television Awards.**

Photo by David Fosher/REX

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WINE & DINE

The food and drink page for West London

Ella stirs up a blog storm

WHETHER she's whizzing up veggies for a juice or heading to yoga for a morning stretch, London based food blogger Ella Woodward glows with good health.

But just four years ago, Woodward's health was waning, leaving the then 19-year-old model and history of art student bed-ridden for up to 16 hours a day, unable to risk a short stroll without suffering heavy heart palpitations and chronic pain.

Eventually diagnosed with postural tachycardia syndrome (PoTS), a potentially debilitating condition which affects the autonomic nervous system and causes symptoms like severe palpitations, headaches and dizziness when standing up, Woodward found that traditional treatments only went so far and decided to completely change her approach to eating, gradually cutting out meat, dairy, sugar and processed food.

As someone who previously wolfed down "mountains" of ice cream and cooked very little, save "boiling pasta" and making the odd dish of scrambled eggs, at first, her U-turn was met with confusion by her family and friends. But Woodward soon began to reap the benefits.

■ FOOD blogger Ella Woodward has now released a new book containing recipes from the diet that has made her feel well again

"It was a gradual process," explains the 23-year-old, who was inspired after reading about an American cancer patient who found making changes to her diet helped her manage her illness.

"After a few weeks of really living and eating differently, I started to feel minor changes. It took 18 months from the beginning of my diet change for me to say, 'OK, I feel like I'm really healed', and gradually, it just built up and got better."

To keep herself on track, she started a blog - deliciouslyella.com - and after a good reaction from readers, and last year a hefty seal of approval in the form of a Blogger Award from Red magazine, she launched a healthy eating app, which has so far attracted 75,000 downloads.

Now, she's just released her first book, also entitled Deliciously Ella.

While Woodward, who was doing a stint of modelling in Paris when she became ill, couldn't have anticipated the impact the diet has had on her health, she also credits it for changing her outlook.

"I would never have thought it would really change me, and I would come out of it a different person, but I really feel I am very different," she says. "I'm much more positive."

She's always been a positive person, she adds, but these days, she tries to appreciate everything a bit more, and to feel grateful for the smaller things in life.

Always pleased to hear from readers ("it makes everything worth it"), she is nevertheless determined to avoid foisting her healthy eating habits onto anyone else.

"My number one aim is to encourage people to introduce some of the healthier elements into their life," says Woodward, who splits her time between London and California, where her boyfriend lives.

"If that's just eating exactly the same as you always have, but adding an extra portion of vegetables, then that's a great place to start. If you start pushing things on people, they resist. No one wants to have things pushed upon them."

But the foodie, who is also training as a nutritionist, has found allies in the most unlikely of people.

"My boyfriend, who is German and grew up on sausages, is now loving it!" she says, laughing.

"Recently, he told me very proudly that he'd had three vegetarian days. And the other day I made a green juice, one of the real hardcore green juices, not with fruit or anything, and I was looking out of the window while we were driving to the airport, and I turned around to see him drinking it."

Her mum and sisters have become vegetarian too, but d espite being hugely pleased that she's having such a positive influence, there are some drawbacks to the success...

"Now when I go home to visit my family, I always cook," she reveals with a laugh. "So now I think, 'Why doesn't anyone cook for me? I need some time away!' But it's fun.

MARK HIX'S RECIPE OF THE WEEK

GOOSE GOULASH

Serves 4

THIS was a fantastic dish we had at a place called Kafe Zielony. It was one of the many courses at a birthday supper for the acclaimed Polish chef Wojciech Modest Amaro – and delicious it was, too.

I suppose in a country that produces a lot of geese, it makes sense to make the excess leg meat into a goulash.

700-800g boned goose or duck leg meat with the skin removed
2tbsp plain flour
60g butter
2 red onions, peeled, halved and finely chopped
4 cloves of garlic, peeled and crushed
2tbsp vegetable or corn oil
½tbsp paprika
½tbsp tomato purée
150ml red wine
1ltr beef or chicken stock
1x200g can of chopped tomatoes
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Cut the goose meat into rough 3cm chunks, then season and dust with flour. Heat a heavy-based frying pan with a couple of tablespoons of the oil and brown the pieces of goose on a high heat, turning as they are cooking. Remove from the pan and transfer to a plate.

In the same pan add the butter, onions, garlic and paprika and stir on a low heat for 2-3 minutes. Add the flour and tomato purée, stir well, then gradually add the red wine and stock, stirring constantly to avoid lumps forming. Add the meat and any juices and the tomatoes, bring back to the boil, season and simmer gently for about 1½ hours until the goose is tender.

It's difficult to put a time on braised dishes so it may well need a bit longer.

If there is too much sauce, then remove the meat and simmer the sauce longer to thicken it or, visa versa – add some water or stock to thin it down.

Ritz comes out on top in London restaurant awards

THE Ritz Restaurant has been named 'Best Restaurant in London 2015' in Bookatable's first ever Restaurant Awards.

The awards which launched this week revealed the top 50 best restaurants in the city, based on verified customer reviews and ratings on www.bookatable.co.uk, Europe's largest online reservations website.

Other restaurants appearing in the Top 50 Best Restaurants in London include Michelin-starred Ametsa with Arzak Instruction, Adam Handling at Caxton, Hakkasan and many more.

Bookatable's Restaurant Awards 2015 analysed over 150,000 verified diner reviews and ratings from the Bookatable website and took into consideration a number of factors including number of reviews submitted, star ratings, and review content to determine the final list of winners.

The brand new awards launched in five regions across the UK with a total of over 130 restaurants receiving accolades. For London specifically, alongside a list of the top 50 best restaurants in the capital, Bookatable has announced top 10s in categories such as best for Italian, Indian and British cuisine, and best for al fresco or afternoon tea, amongst others. All reviews on the site are left by verified Bookatable diners; only people who have actually dined at the restaurant can leave a review.

Speaking about the awards, Joe Steele, chief executive of Bookatable, said: "Reviews are playing an ever more vital role in the decision-making process for diners when choosing a restaurant. We have made diner reviews a key feature of our site, to help our consumers to discover and be inspired by trusted ratings from fellow foodies. As part of this, we are pleased to launch our very own restaurant awards, based on the data from our hundreds of thousands of verified reviews by consumers who have booked online and dined through Bookatable.co.uk."

Diners can book the winning and top rated restaurants online at Bookatable here: www.bookatable.co.uk/top-rated-restaurants-london

Top 20 Best Restaurants in London

1. The Ritz Restaurant – London
2. Alain Ducasse at The Dorchester
3. The Goring Dining Room
4. Marcus
5. Koffmann's Knightsbridge
6. Roux at The Landau
7. Hakkasan - Mayfair
8. Afternoon Tea at The Library Lounge
9. L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon
10. Galvin at Windows
11. Ametsa with Arzak Instruction
12. Moro
13. Galvin La Chapelle
14. Heliot Steakhouse
15. The Park Room and Library
16. The Northall at Corinthia Hotel London
17. Adam Handling at Caxton
18. Hawksmoor Seven Dials
19. Palm Court Brasserie
20. Winter Garden at The Landmark London Hotel

A natural wonder

Sir David Attenborough has been bringing the nation ground breaking programmes about the natural world for over 60 years. Busier than ever, the veteran broadcaster talks about the third series of Natural Curiosities and why retirement is not in his thoughts.

TAKE the wonders of the world, add Sir David Attenborough's dulcet tones, throw in some stunning wildlife camerawork, and you are guaranteed television gold.

It is no surprise that the new series Natural Curiosities has - like nearly everything that the veteran broadcaster produces - proven to be such a huge hit.

Now in its third season, the current run will see Attenborough delve into the domain of some of the most extraordinary and baffling species on the planet, from the anaconda to the flea.

"I just think there are more varied animals in this series than almost any other series you could think of," Attenborough says with trademark great enthusiasm.

"Ranging from whales to fleas to camels to cheetahs, there is just a whole range of things. And the interesting thing is to find one particular aspect that is perhaps unexpected and that you wouldn't have thought of, and particularly wouldn't have thought in connection to the other half of the problem which join together.

'Who thought they'd be a link between a flea and a cheetah?"

If there was anyone who you would back to find a link between a flea and a cheetah, it would be Attenborough. For over 60 years, the 88-year-old naturalist has been the oracle on all things nature helping our understanding of the world around from the Antarctic to the Amazon rainforest.

But even a man as learned and well-travelled as Attenborough says that there is always something else to discover. It continues to be his main motivation.

Pleasure

"Oh yes, you'll never find everything out. You can't possibly find everything out. I never lose my curiosity for finding out things. It's a pleasure. Finding out new things is a pleasure, and this series has been a pleasure, it really has."

For this reason, Attenborough says Natural Curiosities has no obvious end point.

"Oh yes, as long as your arm really. We could go on making these series for a very long time. As long as people want us. We all made a list of the sort of things were interesting and then looking for links to pair them up. We've got a few more numbers up our sleeves, anyway."

It isn't just Natural Curiosities that he has up his sleeve for our entertainment, either. Conquest of the Skies, a Sky 3D series exploring nature's greatest aeronauts has already aired to great acclaim, while later this year, a programme about the Great Barrier Reef , which he calls "the most remarkable place of breath-taking beauty" airs for the first time in 2015.

It will be the 24th naturalist programme bearing Attenborough's influence to be aired in the last five years alone, meaning he has never been busier, despite approaching his 10th decade on earth. He wouldn't have it any other way.

"I can't be more grateful that people ask me to make programmes. I'm very lucky and it's a great privilege. I can't believe I'm that lucky."

So can we take it there are no plans to retire?

"Not while I'm vertical, no. Here I am at 88 and a lot of people at 88 aren't able to do any work as nobody has given them any work. I just count my lucky stars.

"And a lot of people my age don't work as they aren't physically able to do it. It's certainly not virtue that has led to this, but it would foolish not to take advantage of it. I just thank my lucky stars."

David Attenborough's Natural Curiosities, new and exclusive to Watch, Mondays at 9pm.

Royal Borough pupils are top of the class

By Jack Dixon

SCHOOL students in Kensington and Chelsea are continuing to outperform their peers throughout inner London – and across the country.

The Department for Education's latest statistics show that schools in the Royal Borough have topped the class with a greater proportion of students obtaining the highest marks than any other local authority nationwide.

According to the figures, almost three quarters of GCSE students in the Royal Borough achieved five or more A* to C grades last year – placing them among the UK's best performing pupils.

The figures – the first to be released since the overhaul of the GCSE examinations system – reveal that 74 per cent of students achieved five top grades or more, well above the national average of 53 per cent, and also above the inner London average of 60 per cent.

Councillor Emma Will, the borough council's cabinet member for education, said the figures demonstrated that Kensington and Chelsea students were still at the top of the class.

"These are excellent results and I am very pleased at what our schools and young people have achieved", she said.

Schools in Kensington and Chelsea appear to have risen to the challenge of more robust examination rules introduced last year, which have made a mockery of the league table system, according to some commentators.

Only students' first attempt at examinations have been used to determine the league tables, as part of a drive to prevent schools entering pupils for resits to improve their ranking. Some qualifications have also been removed so as to measure only the highest academic quality.

Despite the rigorous new format, Kensington and Chelsea schools have returned the best statistics in the country – a trend Cllr Will attributed to individual efforts of staff and students.

She added: "It has been well documented that the marking for this year's exams has been very rigorous. But the results reflect the sheer hard work put in by our students and their teachers, and the high quality of education on offer in the Royal Borough."

Credit Union at primary school

A WEST London-based credit union has held a pop-up session at a local primary school to support parents at risk from loan sharks.

YourCU held a session at Colville Primary School on January 28 in Lonsdale Road, Portobello.

The credit union was invited to the school by headmaster Jagdeep Birdi after concerns cash-strapped parents could turn to illegal lenders.

"Every child deserves to feel they do not have to worry about money. A secure family is the best place for a child to thrive," said Mr Birdi.

More than half of the pupils at Colville are eligible for support through pupil premium, which includes free school meals - well above the national average.

The visit followed calls from the Archbishop of Canterbury, in his New Year's speech, for a network of clubs, run by credit unions, in primary schools to help raise financial awareness.

Cllr Emma Will, the Royal Borough's Cabinet Member for Education, said: "The YourCu pop-up is providing an opportunity for schoolchildren to get a lesson in basic banking and the important role that credit unions play in society.

"By providing small loans at affordable rates with weekly or monthly repayment schedules credit unions help those who may not be able to access a bank loan or suddenly find they need a loan to help with an unexpected emergency. They might be tempted to resort to loan sharks and end up being charged rates of interest that make paying back the loan impossible. I would urge anyone who knows of loan sharks to report it using the confidential hotline, 0300 555 2222."

William Rhodes, YourCU chief executive: "We are seeing a growing number of families in the borough, many on lower incomes, struggling to make ends meet. Many banks and building societies are now so risk-averse many people no longer have access to high street loans. But plenty of illegal lenders are prepared to fill this void - and are charging horrifying rates of interest.

"Credit unions like YourCU are there to help provide members with access to affordable loans and help to manage money responsibly. We also support people to save regularly – it doesn't matter how little – just a small amount put into a savings each week will build up a financial 'buffer'."

YourCu is keen to hear from other schools in West London who would like to interest parents in becoming members of the financial co-operative.

The Kensington High Street-based union is a member of the Financial Services Compensation Scheme and offers flexible loans to suit all budgets to repay on a weekly, two-weekly or monthly basis.

For further information visit: www.yourcu.co.uk or call: 020 7605 6341.

Half term fun

THERE is a range of fun activities on offer for children aged from five to ten years during the February half-term holiday at the Royal Borough's Ecology Centre in Holland Park, W8.

From Monday 16 to Friday 20 February there are two-hour sessions each morning and afternoon covering a range of environment themed events including: bird watching, making a wormery, investigating animal tracks, exploring the wildlife area, hunting for minibeasts and more.

Spaces are limited so booking is essential. The cost is £4.20 per session for residents and £5.40 for non residents. Children under eight years must be accompanied by an adult. To book a place email the Holland Park Ecology Centre: ecology.centre@rbkc.gov.uk or phone 020 7938 8186 or go to www.rbkc.gov.uk/ecology

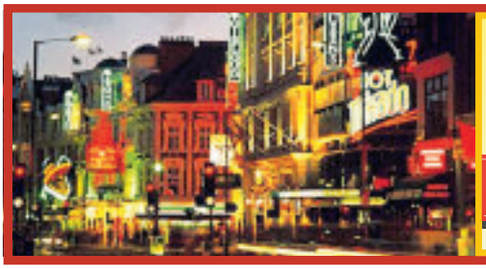
Pimilico Academy is top uni performing school

PIMLICO Academy, in Lupus Street, is a top performing school with its students winning places at Britain's best universities.

Post-16 data just released shows that almost a quarter (23 per cent) of students leaving the school in summer 2013 achieved Russell Group places – almost the highest in Westminster. Five per cent won places at Oxford or Cambridge.

Overall, a further 32 per cent went onto various higher education institutions.

A spokesman for the sponsor, Future Academies, said: "Pimlico Academy is a highly aspirational school where we pride ourselves on our determination to deliver excellence."



TALK OF THE TOWN

MUSIC ★ THEATRE ★ PUBS

The entertainment scene in West London

■ LONDON'S historic Apple Market in Covent Garden was transformed into a scene from The Very Hungry Caterpillar as TV presenter Laura Hamilton teamed up Action for Children to launch its annual fundraising campaign for children, The Giant Wiggle, taking place on March19th.

Get a wiggle on with the Very Hungry Caterpillar

LEADING charity Action for Children is teaming up with television presenter Laura Hamilton, from A Place in the Sun and Beat My Build, and best-selling children's book The Very Hungry Caterpillar™ (Puffin Books) to get under-5's fundraising in a sponsored walk to help other children in an event called The Giant Wiggle on March 19th. Laura Hamilton said: "The Giant Wiggle is a fantastic opportunity for youngsters to get involved with a charity that helps other children, while having fun with their friends at the same time. My little Rocco and I will be getting our wiggles on – so come and join the fun!" All money raised through the event will support Action for Children's work across the country to help vulnerable children, young people and families in the heart of communities. Action for Children provides early years child development, learning and childcare services to thousands of children throughout the UK, through its children's and family centres.

Cawston Press, the makers of pressed juice, are proud supporters of The Giant Wiggle in 2015. There are Giant Wiggle promotional packs of their Kids' Blend juices in supermarkets now – blends of pressed juice and water made especially for growing taste-buds.

For more information on how to organise your own Giant Wiggle at your nursery or children's centre visit www.actionforchildren.org.uk/giantwiggle.

Lunchtime culture on offer in Notting Hill

NOTTING Hill music lovers are being reminded that free recitals of chamber music are available every Monday and Thursday for those who want to bring culture to their lunch hour.

The recitals take place every Monday lunchtime at St. Peter's Church on Kensington Park Road and every Thursday lunchtime at St. John's Church on Lansdowne Crescent.

"The music is essentially core chamber music repertoire by string quartets, piano trios, duets and soloists who are mostly pianists," said organiser Richard Carruthers, who began church concerts in Notting Hill eight years ago.

"The featured musicians range from professional orchestral players seeking to play in smaller-scale settings, to students and graduates of our exceptional schools such as the Royal College and Royal Academy of Music.

"The repertoire is mostly well established chamber music but living composers often premiere their works at the series.

"The performance quality is extremely high with players attracted by incentives such as free recording and videoing of their performances and the opportunity for the wider public to hear and see them on the Music Chamber site and YouTube.

"The series regularly features complete cycles of major composers works, for example we are currently programming multiple concerts of all Beethoven's violin sonatas, all Bach's Cello suites and all Chopin's piano works - making the series an accessible way of familiarising yourself with core classical repertoire."

Richard Carruthers is a lifetime lover of music and used the recording and production skills he learned while working for BBC News to start a small independent record label specializing in classical chamber music and jazz. He has sourced all musicians who have begun their careers on his label 'Music Chamber' from appearances they made at the concert series.

"Our audience is varied and includes elderly retired folk, local workers, children and the disabled," he said.

"We provide free tea, coffee and biscuits and there is a retiring collection. Two thirds is given to the musicians and a third is kept by the church for expenses like piano tuning.

Details of upcoming concerts can be found at www.music-chamber.com. Richard can be emailed at contact@music-chamber.com .

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The sheep will bring you peace and love!

IT'S the Year Of The Sheep and as London, and in particular Chinatown, prepares to celebrate the Chinese New Year on February 22nd with the biggest celebrations in Europe, here's a guide of what a Sheep Year should bring for you.

And the good news is, it should bring you peace.

According to The Astrology Club (www.atrologyclub.org) the Sheep is a Yin energy, a symbol of peace, harmonious co-existence and tranquility. That is the primary and fundamental mood for this year.

"Although there are cries for war and a countdown is soon to begin, war will be averted and a period of mending and compromise will be undertaken to ensure peace is maintained.

"The Sheep is the symbol of the Arts. It relates to passive and nurturing times. It will help the healing process with regard to past events caused by individuals who have little respect for the human race or life itself.

"It will be a year of banding together in faith and in belief that good will prevail and win out over the forces that refuse to comply to a peaceful way of life. For those who trust in goodness, happiness and success will follow.

"The emphasis will be on joining forces in order to fight the evil and destruction that has been brewing. With the planet Saturn into the sign Scorpio and the planet Pluto in its long stay in the sign Capricorn, there will be greater concern with structure, getting back to basics and using greater intuition to find solutions to problems that have been plaguing the world for some time.

"Much will depend on this – the balance of international economy and social harmony is in peace. The call for war is not a step to be taken lightly. Though swords are rattling on either side, as the calming vapors of the Sheep year spreads over the Nations, sentiments will be kindled and wisdom will prevail.

"Fate will send emissaries to change the faces of aggression towards a more peaceful compromise. It does not kill the doubts, anger or desire for violence, but it puts a blanket of constrain over it.

"So will it be among family members and bitter economic rivals. Many will look into their hearts and souls and wonder at past passionate grievances and the realisation that the road to harmony and economic strength is through peaceful rather than violent ways.

"On the family front, it will be a time to unite and instil loyalty and discipline. Angers will cool and decisions that will disrupt family harmony will be laid aside to give it time to heal. So capture the moment to mend fences and broken promises.

"The aura of the 2015 Sheep year will gradually radiate its way to all. The most turbulent times will be during the period of the Dragon, which is from the Vernal Equinox on March 20th till April 20th, and especially the period of the Ox where a grave threat will again raise its ugly head. This will be from the Day of the Winter Solstice on the 22nd of December till the 20th of January 2016.

"2015 is a year to use mental abilities over brute force. For those who wish to be aggressive, expect to be out-maneuvered by strategy and common sense."

Sunday February 22nd 2015 will mark the arrival of the Chinese New Year of the Sheep, with London set to host the biggest celebrations in Europe.

2015's Year of the Sheep celebrations will run from 10am to 6pm, and all are free to attend.

The festivities will begin with a New Year's Parade beginning in Trafalgar Square, winding through the West End, before reaching its final destination in Chinatown.

The opening ceremony at midday officially launches the celebrations in Trafalgar Square, followed by an array of stage performances from performing troupes from China, including acrobatics, traditional dances and a gravity-defying lion dance on high poles.

One of the key attractions for 2015 includes the "Cultures of China, Festival of Spring", a variety show produced by Mr Wei Ding, who performed the renowned culture evening show in front of world leaders at the recent APEC Submit.

Alongside the festivities in Trafalgar Square, a second stage on Shaftesbury Avenue in Chinatown plays host to performances from a range of local performers and up-and coming talent.

Chinatown itself is always at the centre of the New Year party. The area will be a hive of activity, with traditional craft stalls and food stands being set up outside restaurants. Guests will be able to sample the widest and most delicious range of Chinese regional cuisine in Europe. A lion dance will be snaking through the streets, stopping by restaurants to wish the owners good luck for the coming year.

There are over 80 restaurants in Chinatown offering a diverse range of cuisines with everything from traditional Hong Kong street food to modern Chinese fusion from Shanghai and Beijing. For a full list of every restaurant in the area and their details visit the Chinatown website: www.chinatownlondon.org/page/home/1/3

CHINESE NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS: Begin at midday on Sunday February 22nd in Trafalgar Square

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DAY:

10am: Parade begins North of Trafalgar Square, ending on Shaftesbury Avenue
12-1pm: Dragon and Lion Dance performance at the Trafalgar Square Stage
13:30: Cultures of China – Festival of Spring performance on Trafalgar Square Stage
15:30: Red Poppy Ladies Percussions Group performance on Trafalgar Square Stage
12-5pm: Lions Dances throughout Chinatown
5pm-6pm: Finale on Trafalgar Square Stage

For more information about the day visit the official website of at www.lccauk.com or Chinatown's website at www.chinatownlondon.org. You can also follow us on Twitter @LondonChinatown #CNYLondon

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Lewin Road, Streatham £1,200,000

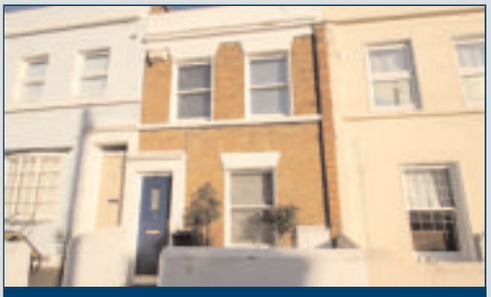
Huge Victorian built terraced house offering great promise in one of Streathams premier roads near the Streatham Hub, the Common and within walking distance of both Streatham and Streatham Common stations. Over 3000 sq. ft. accommodation arranged over three floors comprises six double bedrooms, two reception rooms, kitchen/ breakfast room, and two bathrooms. There is off street parking and a south facing rear garden of some 50ft. EPC to be confirmed.

Arragon Gardens, Streatham £379,950

Lovely, bright and spacious first floor flat in attractive converted house within easy reach of both Streatham Common, Streatham and Norbury stations and only a few yards from Streatham High Road and the Common. Accommodation comprises two double bedrooms, gorgeous large sitting/dining room, sizeable and bright kitchen and modern bathroom/wc. The property is offered for sale with a third share of the freehold. EPC rating C.

Glenister Park Road, Streatham Vale £419,950

Mid terraced 1930's built house within walking distance of Streatham Common station. Accommodation comprises three bedrooms, two reception rooms, kitchen and bathroom/wc. Some updating required. Externally, there is off street parking and lovely south facing rear garden of over 35ft. EPC Rating E.



Wellfield Road, Streatham £630,000

Characterful Victorian built mid terraced house in popular 'Streatham Village' location. Accommodation comprises three double bedrooms, large sitting/dining room, stylish kitchen/breakfast room and two bathrooms. Externally, there is a cosy rear garden of some 25ft. EPC to be advised.

Pollards Hill South, Pollards Hill £525,000

Absolutely beautifully refurbished terraced house in an exclusive and peaceful cul de sac only a stone's throw from Pollards Hill and a 10/12 minute walk to Norbury station. Accommodation comprises three bedrooms, wonderful open plan through reception room and stunning contemporary fitted kitchen, light filled conservatory, bathroom/wc downstairs shower room. A gorgeous south facing rear garden stretching some 120 100ft and a garage en-bloc. EPC rating D.

Ellison Road, Streatham £649,995

Lovely and unusual extended Victorian built semi detached house within walking distance of Streatham Common station. Accommodation comprises three bedrooms, two reception rooms, two kitchen/breakfast rooms, utility room, bathroom/wc and shower room/ wc. Externally, there is off street parking for two cars, shared side access and a super west facing rear garden of over 90ft. EPC to be confirmed.

Woodgate Drive, Streatham Vale £425,000

Well-cared for late 1990's built mid terraced house only a 2/3 minute walk to Streatham Common station and local shops. Accommodation comprises three bedrooms, large sitting room come dining room, modern kitchen, two shower rooms, and downstairs cloakroom. Externally, there is an allocated parking space and very manageable lawned rear garden of some 25ft x 16ft. EPC rating C.

Donnybrook Road, Streatham Vale £499,950

Spacious extended terraced 1930's house situated literally minutes from Streatham Common station in a no through road. Accommodation comprises four bedrooms, two reception rooms, modern kitchen, and two bathroom/wcs. Externally, there is a super rear garden with decked patio extending over 40ft. EPC Rating D.

Turle Road, Norbury

25 Turle Road, Norbury SW16 5QW

We are acting in the sale of the above property and have received an offer of **£365,000**.

Any interested parties must submit any higher offers in writing to the selling agent before an exchange of contracts takes place.

Thompson Vales, 432/434 Streatham High Road, Streatham, SW16 3PX. EPC rating E.

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LONDON WEEKLY NEWS sport

Same old R's

LOFTUS ROAD RANGERS REVIEW
With Tony McDonald

AFTER a two-week break, normal service has been resumed at QPR. The R's lost another away Premier League match – their 11th in a row – and their leaky defence gifted their opponents three more goals. And to the huge relief of his 2,875,681 followers, Joseph Barton has ended his self-imposed sabbatical and re-entered Twitterland.

In fairness to Barton, no-one went closer to salvaging the team's first away point of the season at Stoke on Saturday than the opinionated Scouser.

After Niko Kranjcar brought R's back into the game with an easy tap-in from four yards out to reduce the deficit to 2-1, Barton was unlucky to see his dipping 25-yard free-kick crash against the underside of the crossbar.

To rub further salt into gaping QPR wounds, the Potters swiftly went up the other end and made it 3-1 in the dying embers of a hard-fought clash.

"Jonathan Walters will never score an easier hat-trick," groaned a deflated Harry Redknapp after witnessing the latest defensive carnage that leaves his side still hovering one place above Leicester City at the bottom.

As usual, he was left desperately clutching any straw he could lay his hands on – and believe it or not, there were a couple to be had. The good news for QPR is that the six clubs all within four points of them were also beaten.

More crucially, star striker Charlie Austin escaped a red card despite TV replays confirming an off-the-ball kick aimed at the shin of Stoke central defender Wollscheid, which was luckily missed by ref Mike Dean and his assistants at the Britannia Stadium. Had they seen Austin's uncharacteristic act of petulance, he would now be serving at least a one-match ban.

Instead, Austin will thankfully be there to lead the line again when high-flying Southampton visit Loftus Road this Saturday. Although surprisingly beaten 1-0 at home by Swansea City on Sunday, Southampton have been a revelation under Dutch boss Ronald Koeman this season and well worth their current position of fourth in the PL table.

The Saints have the meanest defence in the league on their travels, having conceded just nine goals in 11 games away from St Mary's, and will put QPR's decent home record to the test. However, they have scored only 13, so R's can expect a tight tussle in which the odd goal may well prove decisive.

If Hoops are to finally break their away day hoodoo, then next Tuesday's visit to Sunderland offers hope, especially if the west Londoners did manage to draft in one or two reinforcements after LWN Sport went to press ahead of Monday's 11pm transfer deadline.

Looking back on the defeat to Mark Hughes' Stoke, Redknapp said: "People will look at the score and see 3-1 and think Stoke were convincing winners but that wasn't the case. How we got beat, I just don't know."

As Harry well knows, the result was down to more abysmal defending. Karl Henry lost possession in the build-up to Stoke's first goal, although keeper Rob Green might have got a stronger left hand to the ball before diverting it into the far corner.

Vargas carelessly gave the ball away in midfield, allowing Ireland to set up Walters for his second with the retreating R's defence outpaced and all at sea.

Redknapp admitted: "Walters won't get an easier hat-trick in his career – we gifted him the goals – and we can't keep making individual errors like that.

"I was sitting there after 20 minutes and was comfortable with the way we were playing.

"The Stoke crowd were moaning and groaning and then we gifted them two quick goals from individual errors."

Redknapp moved Leroy Fer from his usual position on the left to his more favoured central midfield role, where he combined with Barton and Henry, with Kranjcar and Vargas providing the width and Austin the lone striker in a modified 4-1-4-1 formation. Dutch international Fer was more effective, going close with a fine strike that stung the palms of Stoke keeper Begovic, while he and Barton played their part in the build-up to R's goal.

Leroy Fer was more effective from central midfield
Pic: Rob Newell/Digital South

Loic Remy scored in the 1-1 draw against Man City

Happy Matic

■ From back page

Was the result better for Chelsea than City?

"Yes, I think that the most important thing after the game is that we have the five points (in hand), which is the same as before. It now depends on us now and we will try to continue like that."

Matic certainly likes games of attrition, like Liverpool and again against City.

"This is nice," he said. "That is why I love football and if we can play like this every game, I will be more than happy."

While there are 45 points still to play for and the season more than half way gone, Matic is not thinking that the hard work has already been done – quite the reverse.

"I think that now it is more difficult, and especially as we have a lot more games coming up, including the Champions League.

"It's going to be hard but game by game we are going to try to win everything possible. We will do our best."

Chelsea's ranks should be swelled by the arrival of Colombia winger Juan Guillermo Cuadrado Bello from Italian side Fiorentina this week.

LWN Sport went to press before the transfer was officially confirmed but the speed merchant is expected to go straight into Mourinho's squad for Saturday's match.

Andre Schurrle's move back to Germany, to Wolfsburg, and a loan deal for Mohamed Salah to Fiorentina were also expected to be completed.

While Diego Costa was suspended for the Man City game and will again be missing for the trip to Villa Park on Saturday, another key player, Cesc Fabregas, is desperate to get back on the pitch and could be available this weekend following a hamstring strain.

Although Matic acknowledges the loss of these icons, he is confident that their replacements, Ramires and Loic Remy, are more than up to the task.

"Of course we need everyone in the team," said Matic.

"But as you saw against City, Ramires and Remy had great games. I think they were the best two players on the pitch for us, they ran a lot and fought for every ball. It was great to play with Ramires and Remy scored a goal and played very well. I think they are going to be very important in the next couple of games."

Matic is fully aware that Chelsea tend to struggle against Aston Villa – who were thrashed 5-0 at Arsenal on Sunday and are now six games without a goal – but he is determined to overcome that threat and show that they have what it takes to push on in the league and keep their five-point cushion at the top.

"Yes, we know that Aston Villa, especially at Villa Park, will be a very difficult team to play against," he said.

"But we have to win. We have to stay in first position and we will do everything we can to win."

Fulham Run

FULHAM FC will stage their Craven Cottage10k Race, starting from the stadium this Sunday.

Known as the Winter Warmer last season (110 entries), this year the race will take the same route. Heading north from Craven Cottage, runners will cross Hammersmith Bridge, loop around Wandsworth's streets, head back along the south bank of the Thames, turn left to cross Putney Bridge, through Bishop's Park and finish in the Craven Cottage grounds.

You can enter on the day of the race for £22. Registration opens at 8.30am, with the start of the race scheduled for 9.30am. Minimum age for entrants is 16.

Runners will also get a chance to have a picture taken pitchside on the day. Each participant will be given their own timing chip for the race, so precise times will be guaranteed for the serious runners.

All proceeds for the event will go towards the club's official charity partner, Prostate Cancer UK, and the Fulham FC Foundation.

To register your place, go online at runnersworld.co.uk/Craven Cottage10k or visit www.fulhamfc.com.

For further info, phone Hayley Wooldridge on 0870 442 5432 or email her at foundationinfo@fulhamfc.com.

Blue & White In Brief

■ **CHELSEA Under-18s are on fire after scoring 14 goals in two easy victories in the space of three days.**

They slaughtered Swansea City 6-0 in the FA Youth Cup fifth round at Cobham last week to earn a sixth round tie in the North-East against either Newcastle United or Sunderland.

Tammy Abraham scored a hat-trick, Dominic Solanke grabbed two and sub Kasey Palmer completed the rout of the Swans.

The unstoppable Abraham – will he be the next young Blue to be handed his first team debut later this season? – has taken his goals tally for the campaign to 23.

On Saturday, the young Blues annihilating Aston Villa 8-3 in the West Midlands. Schoolboy striker Ike Ugbo netted a hat-trick, midfielders Mukhtar Ali and Charlie Wakefield scored two apiece and Kyle Scott bagged a penalty as Joe Edwards' side moved eight points clear of Villa at the top of the league.

Chelsea: Collins, Wakefield, Suljic, Brady (Chalobah 4), Tomori (Muheim 60), Grant, Sammut, Ali, Scott (Adamczyk 65), Christie-Davies, Ugbo.

■ **TWO first half goals from Aaron Redford earned Fulham U18s a 2-0 home win over Southampton on Saturday.**

Earlier in the week, the Whites' U21s gained a 3-3 draw at Everton thanks to goals from Adam Taggart, Ange-Freddy Plumain and Buomesca Tue Na Bangna.

Fulham (v Everton): Norman, Baba, Passley, Buata (Della Verde 57), Evans, Sambou (Edun 20), Mesca, Plumain, Williams, Richards, Taggart (Redford 67).

● RUGBY UNION

Tabard 17... Hammersmith & Fulham... 8

HAMMERSMITH and Fulham were bullied by a resurgent Tabard side to continue a poor start to the New Year, going down 17-8 on Saturday.

Their third defeat in four games, Hammers were dominated by Tabard's huge pack in dire conditions which made for a forward-dominated game with little spectacle. Tabard's superior scrum saw them extend their impressive run to six wins in a row.

Hammers' head coach Dave Mannion said: "There's not much you can do when you come up against such a huge pack of forwards who are so dominant in the scrum.

"It wasn't a day for our backs to shine but I was very proud of the boys for the way they stuck at it in challenging circumstances and conditions."

Hammers were chasing the game at half-time thanks to a penalty try and a push-over score from the home side. Replacements in the front-row managed to sure up Hammers' scrum and flanker Joel Rabbidge scored from close quarters in the second half for a consolation try.

Full-back Neil McClure added three points with a penalty but the damage had already been done and it was too late for Hammers to chase down the game.

Hammers' Ladies lost 14-5 to Old Albanians to round off a poor weekend for the club.

The first XV, who are aiming for a top-two finish, face Staines at Hurlingham Park on Saturday (2.00 pm) attempting to get their season back on track.

BETTIN£ BANTER

PLENTY of impartial punters would have fancied a weakened Chelsea and Manchester City to draw, which reached a high of 4.8 (19/5) on the Betfair Exchange.

With Diego Costa banned, Sergio Aguero became the pre-match favourite in the First Goalscorer market but it was Blues' Loic Remy, available at 8.2 (around 7/1), who justified his recall for the Spaniard by breaking the deadlock.

Five points clear, Chelsea remain firm 2/9 (1.22) title favourites and are now a short-priced 1.33 (1/3) to lift the Capital One Cup when they meet Spurs in the final on March 1.

The hat-trick scored by Jon Walters to defeat QPR 3-1 was the first-ever by a Stoke player in the Premier League. In fact, a Hat-trick To Be Scored in the game was a long shot at 36.0 (35/1).

Looking ahead to this Saturday, there is no value at all in backing 'bankers' Chelsea to win at Aston Villa, who have gone eight league games without victory and failed to score in 10 hours of play. Blues are just 1.33 (1/33) to prevail at Villa Park. I'd much rather back Chelsea to win by either 2-0 (4/1) or 3-0 (7/1) in the Correct Score market.

How many of the QPR faithful will be tempted to back Harry's Hoops to return to winning ways at home against Southampton by snapping up the 4.33 (100/30) on offer? Be very careful, though – Saints have conceded the fewest goals (17) in 23 league games, which is three less than Chelsea.

If Fulham fans fancy their boys to continue their recent good home league form, then they look a decent even money (2.00) shot to see off mid-table Birmingham.

But remember, City are no longer a soft touch on their travels, having lost only four out of 14 away from St Andrew's, so this is a difficult one to call.

Good luck – and always bet responsibly.

Tony McDonald

FOOTBALL FIXTURES

Friday, February 6
West Ham Utd U21 v FULHAM U21, 7.00.
Saturday, February 7
CHELSEA U18 v Brighton & H.A. U18, 11.00.
Colchester Utd U18 v QPR U18, 11.00.
West Ham Utd U18 v FULHAM U18, 11.00.
Aston Villa v CHELSEA, 3.00.
FULHAM v Birmingham City, 3.00.
QPR v Southampton, 3.00.
Tuesday, February 10
Sunderland v QPR, 7.45.
Bolton Wanderers v FULHAM, 8.00.
Wednesday, February 11
CHELSEA v Everton, 7.45.

London Weekly News

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THE SOUND OF SILENCE

Diego Costa was at the centre of the stamping controversy Pic: Rob Newell/Digital South

SILENCE is Golden sang the 1960s Dagenham pop band The Tremeloes, and this was a week in which Jose Mourinho decided to become the Golden One rather than the Special One.

● By LWN reporter **Paul Lagan**
sport@londonweeklynews.co.uk

But say what you like about him, and many do, no-one can deny he is a tactical genius.

Having succumbed to the global embarrassment of being dumped out of the FA Cup by League One Bradford City, three days later Mourinho and the Blues faced a rejuvenated Liverpool in the Capital One Cup semi-final at the Bridge.

After an energy-sapping 120 minutes Mourinho's charges were booking a berth at Wembley to face Spurs thanks to a 94th winner from Branislav Ivanovic.

But then all hell broke loose as 'Stamp Gate' reared its ugly head. Diego Costa was vilified on national TV by what it called a "crime" of deliberately stamping on Liverpool's Emre Can. Trial by TV is nothing new, of course, but this was particularly vicious by Sky and quickly echoed by the back pages of the national newspapers the following day.

Mourinho stormed into the post-match press conference with just two items on his agenda – to defend his striker to the hilt and to punch the air with the rallying cry of "We are going to Wembley."

Mourinho, already briefed about what the media were reporting regarding the stamp incident, attempted to nip the situation in the bud by claiming Costa "accidentally" trod on Can.

Sadly for him, that plaintive assertion and motivating rallying cry was all but drowned out.

Because referee Michael Oliver said he had missed the incident during the game, having then reviewed the challenge on TV, he decided that had he seen it in 'real time', he would have sent Costa off. That prompted an FA charge of violent conduct on Costa.

The striker challenged the charge and the club supported him. But the so-called independent panel decided the Brazil-born Spain international was guilty and thus handed him a three-match ban on Friday, ensuring that he missed Saturday's monster crunch league match against Manchester City and the upcoming game at Aston Villa on Saturday, as well as next Wednesday's home encounter with Everton.

So what was Mourinho's reaction? Someone at Chelsea decided that he would snub the media last Friday which was to preview the City game. He also failed to attend the post-match press conference after Blues retained their five-point lead over second place City with a 1-1 draw.

At half-time of that game, a Chelsea spokesman told me that neither Mourinho nor assistant Steve Holland would be appearing to fulfil their obligatory Premier League media duties. I asked who decided on this course of action – the club's hierarchy (i.e. the board), the communications chief or Mourinho himself? "The answer to that is for another day," the spokesman confirmed to me.

The calculated risk of this strategy is that Chelsea will be fined by the FA but, of course, it will be a drop in the ocean to the club's coffers and won't affect them unduly.

But it's the damage to Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich's reputation that is the true risk. For a multi-billionaire like him, money usually allows him to get what he wants.

But it does not buy respect. The constant negative media examination of his club does have a knock-on effect. Can you imagine the fictional scenario where Roman is on his luxury boat entertaining the great and the good of the world's leading oligarchs. All is going well, when suddenly one oligarch upstart, desperate to rise within its ranks, shouts out so all can hear: "So, Roman, why can't you control that club and football manager of yours, eh?"

No amount of cash can smooth away the obvious insult. A good reputation means everything to those for whom money can buy everything else.

Quite where all this nonsense will end is anybody's guess. Further FA sanctions against the club are inevitable. Chelsea tend to hope that problems eventually go away if they don't draw attention to them. Except keeping Mourinho silent is not the best way to make a problem disappear.

However, the siege mentality that Mourinho likes to engender during times of adversity certainly can reap benefits in terms of results on the pitch.

This week at STAMFORD BRIDGE

NEMANJA Matic, the Serbia midfielder, gave an exclusive interview to LWN Sport after the dramatic 1-1 draw against title rivals Manchester City at the Bridge on Saturday, when Chelsea took the lead through Loic Remy before they were pegged back by David Silva.

The 26-year-old thoroughly enjoys the rough and tumble of the Premier League and has words of warning to City and the rest of the league that Chelsea are in front and are determined to stay there.

"It was very good game," said Matic. "It was very hard for us, especially in the second half. City were more fresh than us. As you know, a few days days ago, we had a very difficult game against Liverpool. We played 120 minutes, so we have to be happy with one point today."

I asked him if Mourinho predicted what would happen when tiredness kicked in and did he plan accordingly?

"Of course. We expected that City were going to play well. They have very good players but I think that we were the better side in the first half," he said.

"That was not the case in the second half. They used the situation that they were fresher than us. But they deserved one point, as did we – a draw was the right result.

■ CONTINUED ON PAGE 27

Focus on Craven Cottage

Wasteful Whites undeterred

FULHAM wasted several good chances to claim at least a point from Saturday's 2-1 league defeat at Blackburn Rovers.

The Whites created plenty of chances at Ewood Park but found themselves 2-0 down after goals in each half from Marshall and Rhodes. Ross McCormack did find the net with a simple close-range finish in the 66th minute – his ninth of the season – but it proved no more than a consolation as Fulham dropped to 15th in the Championship table.

"I thought we were worthy of a point at least. That's how football can go sometimes – we needed to take our chances," said manager Kit Symons afterwards. "We created quite a few opportunities but you need to take them when they come along.

"I'm very disappointed because we deserved something out of that game. We put in a good shift and played some good football at times, so it's a tough one to take.

"But I'm proud of my players. The performance was good and I thought they played well, so I've got no complaints with them. It just wasn't to be our day."

Debutant right-back Ashley 'Jazz' Richards, Fulham's new on-loan signing from Swansea City, saw his close-range shot saved after a clever pass from McCormack, while Cauley Woodrow miscued a fine chance wide of the target and a Lasse Vigen Christensen header went the wrong side of the near-post.

In the second half Woodrow slammed a shot against the crossbar, although Rovers were also denied by an upright.

Symons continued: "Our build-up play was good. But they were two very poor goals to concede from our point of view – you let them in and you've got a mountain to climb. But the overall play was solid.

"We've come a long way in a relatively short space of time and this team is developing all the time," he said. "There's room for improvement, without a doubt, but it's coming. I've got high hopes for this group of players, I believe in them massively and they're starting to believe in themselves.

"Today was a tough one to take but it won't dampen what we do or my belief in the way we work."

Ross McCormack, now the club's joint top scorer with Hugo Rodallega, said: "I think we had enough chances in the first half – I had a couple, Cauley had a good chance, so if we'd maybe gone in 2-1 up that might have been fair.

"We could have taken something from the game," McCormack admitted. "We had a couple more chances after I scored."

Whites had embarked on a four-game unbeaten run prior to their Ewood Park trip but McCormack insists the defeat won't affect their confidence.

"We won't drop our heads," he insisted. "We had a chat after the game – we've got a young team. Where we want to go and where we're getting to, we feel we're making good strides.

"After the first seven or eight games of the season we had one point. Compare that to where we are now and it shows that we're a good set of lads with good character and good ability. It's important that we stay together and try and help the young boys around the squad to improve."

After Tuesday's (Feb 4) FA Cup fourth round replay against Sunderland, Fulham are in action at Craven Cottage again this Saturday when Birmingham City are the visitors, followed by a trip to Bolton next Tuesday.

NORMAL SERVICE RESUMED AT QPR – page 27